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AGNES;
OR
BEAUTY AND PLEASURE.

BY
G. W. M. REYNOLDS.

VOL. 2.

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V² AGNES; OR, BEAUTY AND PLEASURE.

CHAPTER I.

AGNES AND LISETTA.

IN a small and mealy furnished chamber on the second floor of a house situated in no very imposing-looking street in the neighbourhood of Soho Square, sat Edgar Marcellin. It was nine o'clock in the morning—the breakfast-things had been arranged upon the table by the maid-of-all-work belonging to the establishment; but

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the young Frenchman appeared to have not the slightest inclination for food. His face was pale—its expression was full of anguish and uneasiness; and at brief intervals he would give vent to his feelings in bitter ejaculations, or else by some impetuous gesture—or he would even start up from his seat, pace rapidly three or four times to and fro in the little apartment like a lion chafing in its narrow cage,—and then fling himself as if distractedly on his seat again.

Presently the postman's well-known knock resounded through the house; and Edgar Marcellin

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murmured bitterly to himself, "Doubtless another day of disappointment for me! No letter! All the appeals which I address to the Government of my country are vain!—the intervention of friends seems to be useless! But what matters it? Am I not altogether wretched and miserable?—have I not upon my mind enough to drive me to distraction and impel me to suicide? But no, no—I must live! Yes—I must see Corinna; and then——"

Here the maid-of-all-work was heard ascending the stairs: she tapped at the door of the apartment, and Marcellin bade her enter. She held a letter in her hand: it was for him—he knew the writing!—it was from a trusty friend in Paris! He hastened to tear open the missive, but more than half with the sickening apprehension that it would prove but a repetition of former communications to the effect that memorials and petitions were all alike unavailing. But no! there were hopeful words at the very outset; and now Edgar began to devour the contents of that letter. He read on—joy was arising in his heart—it expanded—there was ample reason as well as scope for its play: the happiest tidings had reached him at length from that quarter whence for so many long dreary months naught but disappointments had flowed! The ban of exile was lifted from off him—his innocence in the political plot on account of which he had suffered, had at length been made fully manifest—and he was restored to all his rights as a French citizen. But this was not all; and the present case afforded a striking illustration of the truth of the proverb which says that "it never rains but it pours:" for all Edgar's pecuniary affairs had been settled and adjusted, and he was not merely reinstated in his political rights, but also in the possession of riches.

An immense load was lifted from the mind of Edgar Marcellin; and if he were not completely happy, at all events he felt his heart more buoyant than for a long time past it had been. His friend in Paris had remitted to a London banker certain funds for his immediate use; and Edgar lost no time in replenishing a purse which for a long time past had been but slenderly furnished. To make immediate emendations in his toilet, and to take measures for the complete re-equipment of his wardrobe with the least possible delay, were matters of easy accomplishment for one possessing adequate funds in our metropolis, where all kinds of resources seem inexhaustible;—and thus within two or three hours after the receipt of the welcome letter, Edgar Marcellin was already another being, alike in personal appearance and inward feeling.

This was the second day after his interview with Corinna in the neighbourhood of Sidney Villa, on which memorable occasion he had heard himself branded as the murderer of Giulio Paoli in Florence. Yes, it was the second day since that occurrence, when he had seen Corinna sink down senseless upon the floor! He had called the next day to inquire after her; but he only saw one of the domestics of the villa; and the information he received was but too well calculated to fill his mind with distress. He was now about to repeat his inquiries at Sidney Villa; and accordingly, between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, he bent his way towards that neighbourhood. This was the hour at which he had been told he might

call; for otherwise his impatience would have led him to the villa immediately after the receipt of the welcome letter in the morning.

The young Frenchman was emerging from the Regent's Park and entering the road leading towards the residence of Agnes Evelyn, when he was accosted by a young female, who had the appearance of belonging to some foreign nation, and whose accent as she spoke English, proved that such was the fact. Accosting Edgar, she said, "Would you have the kindness, sir, to tell me the way——"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Edgar, giving vent to the exclamation in French; and then, having again for a few moments studied the young woman's features, he cried in Italian, "Surely you are that self-same Lisetta whom I beheld at a certain villa in the Vale of Arno some eight months ago?"

"Yes, signor," responded Lisetta—for she it indeed was; and she now also spoke in her own native Italian tongue: "that is my name. But I do not recollect——Ah! is it possible? Can you be that French gentleman, M. Marcellin——"

"Yes—I am he," replied Edgar. "But you find me much changed? I have been very ill—or at least I have suffered much—and then too, in this country, a foreigner finds it more convenient to appear with his face as smooth as possible,"—at the same time touching his upper lip and his chin; "so that it was really no wonder, Lisetta, if you did not immediately recognise me. But what are you doing in England?"

"Do not question me, signor," responded Lisetta: "I have a duty to perform—and I shall accomplish it," she added, with a singular expression of countenance. "Therefore, if you can aid me by indicating the way towards a place called Sidney Villa——"

"Ah! you are going thither?" said Marcellin, with an air of surprise. "But is it possible that——"

"Do not detain me, signor," said the Italian girl urgently; "but show me the way, if you happen to know it."

"I am going thither," rejoined Edgar; "and you can accompany me."

"Fow, signor, going thither?" ejaculated Lisetta. "But this is strange!"

"Yes—and I likewise find it strange," exclaimed Marcellin, "to encounter you here, and to learn that your destination is the same as mine. Let us not hesitate to give explanations and compare notes."

"Assuredly not," replied Lisetta. "My business is with a young lady named Corinna Paoli. Ah! signor, you cannot surely have forgotten that mysterious tragedy—the assassination of the young page Giulio——"

"Forgotten it?" exclaimed Edgar. "No—by heaven! it were not easy to forget it!"—and then he thought within himself, "This is more and more strange; for at all events the girl does not seem to be aware of the accusation made against myself!"

"It was indeed a horrible occurrence, signor," said Lisetta. "But do you know Corinna Paoli? are you aware, then, that it was her own brother—alas, poor Giulio!" and Lisetta hastily dashed away the tears from her eyes.

"Yes—I know Coriona," answered Edgar: "but whether we shall see her this day, I cannot say—for she is ill. Tell me, Lisetta—have you ever entertained any suspicion in respect to the assassin of poor Giulio?"

The girl fixed her large dark eyes upon the Frenchman's countenance, as if to read the inmost purposes of his soul; and she at length said, "Why do you ask? What interest can you, a mere flying visitor to Florence at the time, entertain with reference to such subjects?"

"What interest, Lisetta! I will tell you. I see that there is something of importance dwelling in your mind—I can read it in your looks. Perhaps this meeting which at first I thought was accidental, may turn out to be providential. Tell me then frankly—did you never hear, Lisetta, a syllable of accusation breathed against myself?"

"Against you, signor?" ejaculated Lisetta, with an air of the most unfeigned astonishment, as she opened wide her large dark eyes. "No—never, never!"

"This is most strange! most wonderful!" muttered Edgar to himself. "When did you leave Florence, Lisetta?"

"A few days after the murder of poor Giulio, signor," replied Lisetta. "Ah! well do I recollect the date! It was during the night of the fourteenth of February that he was murdered; and it was on the eighteenth I left Florence."

"It was on the fifteenth that I left," said Marcellin,—"the day after the murder. Did no evil rumour prevail?—are you quite confident?"

"I heard none—and to my knowledge none prevailed. But my God!" exclaimed Lisetta, "what do you mean by this questioning? Is it possible that after all I am wrong—that my suspicions have been most unjustly directed towards an innocent person? In short, signor, is it your breast that is tortured with remorse? was it *your* hand—Ah! I recollect! that same evening you also departed from the villa! It was on horse-back—you must have left it about the same time—to pursue the same road—Oh, my God! to think that all this should never have struck me before, and that for months past I have been accusing one who is innocent!"

Lisetta's face had rapidly grown more expressive of the strong feelings of amazement, horror, and consternation which she was experiencing as she thus spoke: she stepped back a pace or two, as if afraid to find herself in contact with one whom she now looked upon as a murderer.

"By heaven, Lisetta!" ejaculated Marcellin, "I swear to you I am innocent. I was as incapable of injuring the hair of that youth's head, as of wickedly and maliciously doing you a mischief at the present moment! But tell me, whom have you all along suspected?"

Lisetta gave no answer: she stood a prey to the most painful bewilderment,—not knowing what to think, or what belief to settle her mind upon,—feeling as if all her purposes, as they existed but a short time back, had now become abruptly and utterly changed.

"For heaven's sake speak, Lisetta!" urged Edgar, in a tone of vehement entreaty: "for this is a matter of life and death to me! I have suffered much—I have been poor—but I now am

suddenly rich again. It was only the day before yesterday that an appalling piece of intelligence was conveyed to my knowledge, to the effect that suspicion rests against me—nay, more, that a veritable accusation has been made—"

"Who made the accusation?" asked Lisetta.

"Signor Paoli is in Florence, seeking to investigate the fate of his son. He has written to his daughter, to say that Giulio was murdered, and that I was his assassin. But who his authority could be, I know not—unless indeed—unless—But no! It could scarcely be!"

Marcellin stopped short in the verbal expression of his thoughts: but he continued musing to himself.

"Tell me what is passing in your mind," said Lisetta; "for if you be really innocent—although heaven knows I am now so bewildered—I know not what to think—"

"Again I swear to you that I *am* innocent!" interrupted Marcellin, with passionate vehemence. "Good God! think you I should stand here looking you in the face, and seeking to prove mine innocence, if I were really guilty? No—I should have skulked away, as every villain skulks from the presence of any one whom he fears may become an accuser! For of what avail were it for me to seek to persuade you that I am guiltless, unless it were that my blood boils at the idea of lying under the imputation of a crime? No other motive could I have: for you cannot stretch forth your hand and grasp me tightly while you invoke the officers of justice to my capture. This is a foreign land; and its laws hold not as amenable unto them those who offend in other climes. And I will tell you more, Lisetta," continued Marcellin, speaking with an energy and emphasis which evidently produced a deep impression upon the young female; "yesterday and the day before I was cursing my fate because I was poor—nay, almost penniless—and unable to speed to Italy and take measures to vindicate my character and prove my innocence. Oh! the thought was distracting, that I was thus fettered and bound by the bonds of penury—chained to the soil of Britain—riveted as it were to the very pavement of London—while my spirit was yearning to take wings and fly to Florence to face my accusers, whoever they might be! And now, Lisetta, this very day has brought me the joyous intelligence that I am rich again; and to-morrow—Oh! to-morrow, was it my intention to set off without delay for your native clime! And think you, Lisetta, that I should do this unless sustained by the proud consciousness of completest innocence?"

The large dark eyes of the Italian girl were fixed penetratingly upon Edgar Marcellin as he spoke; and when he had finished, she reflected deeply for a few moments. Then she said in a tone which showed that she was more than half inclined to proclaim her conviction of his innocence, "Have you any idea from what source could have emanated an accusation of which you only heard for the first time the day before yesterday?"

It was now Edgar's turn to reflect for a few moments; and then he said, "Yes, Lisetta—this meeting is evidently providential, and must not be termed accidental. I will deal candidly with you; we must give each other our confidence. It

is not the first time that I found myself accused of that dread deed——"

"Ah!"—and now a shade of mistrustfulness again came over Lisetta's countenance.

"Change not your opinion of me!" quickly resumed Marcellin; "but listen while I frankly admit that I left Florence on account of that accusation."

"Who made it against you?" asked Lisetta quickly.

"The Marchioness di Mirano," rejoined Edgar.

"Ah!"—and a strange light gleamed in Lisetta's eyes.

"Yes—it was the Marchioness," exclaimed Edgar; "and she urged me to depart under pain of being denounced and arrested as the assassin of the boy. I admit there were certain little circumstances which appeared to give a colour to her ladyship's accusation; and those circumstances seemed at the time to constitute an immense amount of evidence against me. But, Oh! I now begin to see things differently—a light has dawned in upon my brain! The Marchioness was really jealous of my amour with Ciprina, though she affected not to be——"

"Jealous!—assuredly she was!" said Lisetta. "No one knew the Marchioness better than I: for four years was I in her service, and almost completely in her confidence. I know that she loved you, signor—though she did not avow the fact to me—yet could I fathom her thoughts——"

"And she accused me of murder," exclaimed Marcellin, "to punish me for having trifled with her—which I certainly did! Yes—she avenged herself most signally! She compelled me to fly from Florence—she thus separated me from Ciprina—Ah! and perhaps it is she who has now denounced me to Signor Paoli as the assassin of his son? But as I live all this shall be cleared up! Ah, I remember, Lisetta, you just now said you had your suspicions. Tell me against whom they were directed—tell me I conjure you!—reveal to me the grounds upon which they are based! The knowledge of everything that you know, may possibly help to lead me all the more easily to the development of mine own innocence and to the dragging of the true culprit to light!"

Lisetta again reflected—but this time longer than on any previous occasion during the present interview; and at length she said, "I will tell you everything, signor. But swear to me that if you yourself are guiltless of the blood of Giulio—as I now believe you to have been—you will avenge him! Yes—swear to me that you will avenge the death of that youth, if circumstances should unmistakably demonstrate that his assassin was the one to whom my suspicions point!"

"I swear to avenge the death of Giulio," said Marcellin solemnly. "Tell me all you know, Lisetta—assist me in the accomplishment of my purpose—and I will do your bidding as you may command."

The Italian girl thereupon commenced her explanations; and she imparted such matters to the knowledge of Edgar that made him listen for a moment with incredulity, and then with mingled amazement and horror, but likewise with the conviction that it was the exact truth which he heard, and that he was being put upon the right track. It is not however necessary for us to acquaint

the reader with those details which Marcellin thus received from the lips of Lisetta: we must leave them to be duly developed in the progress of our story.

"And thus," said Marcellin, after Lisetta's narrative was concluded, "you came to England to communicate these suspicions to the family of the murdered youth?"

"Yes," responded Lisetta. "Giulio had in confidence informed me that he belonged to a well-known family of Neapolitan refugees—that this family was in London—and that he frequently sent them pecuniary assistance. I did not know the address of the Paolis' abode in London: Giulio never happened to mention it: and when I set off from Florence with the determination of seeking the British metropolis, I little thought how vast it was and how hopeless was the task of discovering any one without a previous knowledge of the individual's residence. I fancied that it was only necessary to go to the head police-office, as one would do in Florence, in order to ascertain the address of any sojourner in the British capital——"

"And thus, my poor girl," said Marcellin, compassionately, "your endeavours were all in vain? Did the Marchioness suspect that you had any ulterior object in leaving her?"

"No—I took care that she should not," replied Lisetta. "I invented a suitable pretext for withdrawing myself from her service."

"And thus, for seven or eight months you have been in England?" said Marcellin inquiringly. "How have you maintained yourself——"

He stopped short; for he perceived that a quick flush crossed Lisetta's countenance. For a moment she hung her head; and then as suddenly raising it, she said, while her cheeks were still tinted with a heightened colour, "I had a well-stored purse when I arrived in London, and I possessed a knowledge of the English language. With these advantages I hoped to make my way until I might choose to return to my native country. But I was cruelly robbed of my gold—it is now too long a tale to tell—suffice it to say that it was so; and then I found that my acquaintance with the English language was of little avail to procure me a respectable situation. What could I do? Starve or beg? Neither! Besides, Signor Marcellin, I will not affect to be a pride; and therefore I may as well admit that I had not been for nearly four years in the Marchioness of Mirano's service——"

"I understand you, Lisetta," interrupted Edgar. "You are good-looking—all good-looking young women are assailed by temptation—and you had not successfully resisted it."

Lisetta blushed; and her large dark eyes were suddenly curtained by the thickly fringed lids, as she flung her regards downward: for though admitting that she had fallen away from the path of virtue, yet she was not hardened in a career of profligacy.

"And thus, signor," she continued, "choosing neither to starve nor beg, I accepted the protection of a foreign gentleman with whom I had become acquainted while travelling from Italy to England. But a few weeks ago he was compelled to fly from London on account of debts; and then I accidentally fell in with a young English gentleman whom I had seen in Florence. His name is

Hailes—and I am now living under his protection.”

“But you loved Giulio, Lisetta?” said Marcellin, inquiringly.

“Yes—I loved him,” she responded: “I loved him fervidly!” added the young female with enthusiasm. “Naught incorrect ever took place between us, for he loved me not in return—he adored the Marchioness—”

“Unhappy youth!” murmured Edgar, compassionately, as he thought of poor Giulio. “But what was your hope, Lisetta, in loving him?”

“How can I answer such a question? Who, in forming an attachment, pauses to reflect on what may be its consequences—how bright its hopes or how bitter its disappointments? Love seizes upon the heart at once, smiting it with the overpowering violence of the storm; or else it steals upon the heart gradually and slowly, like delicious music from a distance or like the sweet perfume from a garden to which one is approaching. I know not precisely how I came to love Giulio—it is sufficient that I *did* love him. It was a strange passion—perfectly pure and chaste—with naught sensual in it. It would have grieved and shocked me if he had sought to treat me as a paramour! Even when tempted astray with others, yet did I still love Giulio, and my heart clung to him. Perhaps you cannot understand this, signor?—and yet it is so! Ah, you know not the heart of woman!—you know not of what inconsistencies it is composed, and how a virtue may sit enmeshed as it were amidst surrounding vices! Yes!—for even as a ray of the blessed sun may pass unpolluted through the midst of the most fetid, noxious, pestilential atmosphere, so may the sentiment of a chaste love pass uncontaminated amidst all the pollutions of the heart!”

Lisetta paused. Marcellin was astounded at the language which she had held, its elegance and its eloquence; and without waiting to consider whether there were any sophistry in the argument or any infatuation in the belief thus enunciated, he could not help admiring the Italian girl who so floridly and strikingly depicted her own feelings.

“But wherefore am I expatiating thus in your hearing?” suddenly exclaimed Lisetta. “We have more important matters to speak of than these—”

“And yet it is not altogether unimportant,” said Marcellin, “for you to explain the motives by which you have been actuated in your desire to avenge the death of Giulio. How was it that you knew Corinna was living at Sidney Villa?—how after so long an interval of disappointment, did you contrive at length to get upon the track of the Paoli family?”

“The explanation is simple,” replied the young Italian woman. “I have already told you that I am living under the protection of a gentleman named Hailes. He is the same of whom you may have possibly read in connexion with the recent duel—”

“Ah! Andrew Hailes?” ejaculated Edgar; “one of the seconds in the duel that was fought the night before last, and in which a certain Mr. Clifford was killed?”

“The same,” responded Lisetta.

“And if I mistake not,” said Marcellin, “Hailes surrendered yesterday afternoon and gave bail for his appearance? But the other second—Mr. Godolphin I believe his name was—has vanished altogether?”

“Yes—that is likewise the case,” rejoined Lisetta. “But on the same evening that the duel was fought, Mr. Hailes and Mr. Godolphin came to the house where I reside with a French woman who is the landlady of it; and they passed the night there. In the morning—that is to say yesterday morning—I was sent with a message to Mrs. Hardress, the wife of the gentleman who killed Mr. Clifford in the duel. Thus I became acquainted with this lady. It may seem to you a long and roundabout story; but I am now coming to the point. This morning I happened to meet Mrs. Hardress: we got into conversation—I told her how I had originally come to London to seek for a refuge of the name of Paoli—and then to my astonishment and joy she informed me that for the last three weeks or a month Signor Paoli’s children had found a hospitable asylum with a friend of her’s, Miss Evelyn of Sidney Villa. I accordingly set off to see Corinna Paoli: but it was decreed that I should in the first instance fall in with you.”

“And now, Lisetta,” said Marcellin, “we will proceed to Sidney Villa. If Corinna will see me—and if she be well enough—”

“She believes you, then, to be the author of her brother’s death?” said Lisetta, inquiringly.

“Alas! her sire’s letter, written from Florence, conveyed the tremendous charge against me! I was close by when Miss Evelyn made the terrific announcement to Corinna the day before yesterday. I rushed forward, proclaiming that it was false; but Corinna sank senseless at our feet. Miss Evelyn, conceiving from my ejaculation who I must be, recoiled from me in horror. I protested mine innocence—I vowed that either circumstantial evidence or slanderous tongues had done me wrong. Miss Evelyn acted nobly; she said that it was far from her desire that an accused person should ever be condemned ere he had been heard in his defence: but she enjoined me to depart at once, promising to communicate to Corinna all that I had said. I left the house accordingly. Yesterday I called: Corinna was very ill, suffering from fever—and she could not be disturbed. It was however intimated to me that I might call again this afternoon; and I am now about to avail myself of the license. But Ah! a thought strikes me! What if you were to go in advance, Lisetta?—what if you were to see Miss Evelyn—and perhaps Corinna—in the first instance?”

“Yes—you have sworn to avenge Giulio,” interrupted the Italian female; “and I will do your bidding.”

She accordingly proceeded to Sidney Villa; and for about half-an-hour Edgar Marcellin remained walking to and fro in the neighbourhood—somewhat anxious and impatient perhaps—but we cannot say that he was the prey to a very painful amount of suspense; for he seemed to be almost completely confident in respect to the result. At length Lisetta reappeared; and Edgar at once saw by her countenance that all had progressed favourably.

CHAPTER II.

THE PORTRAIT-GALLERY.

WE must now again transport the attention of our readers to the gay city of Florence. As these self-same readers of ours may have gleaned from the preceding chapter, it was about eight months since the murder of the page Giulio and the abrupt departure of Edgar Marcellin from the Tuscan capital. During this interval Ciprina had still continued to reside with the Marchioness di Mirano, and they remained upon the most excellent terms together.

It was about ten days after the meeting between Edgar Marcellin and Lisetta in England, as recorded in the preceding chapter, that the ensuing scene took place in Florence. It was the end of October: but the breeze was still balmy and the air warm in that Italian clime: the foliage was verdant in the gardens attached to the Marchioness di Mirano's palatial mansion in the city, as well as in the pleasure-grounds belonging to the delightful villa in the Vale of Arno.

It was evening: the time-pieces had just proclaimed the hour of seven—dinner was over—the Marchioness and Ciprina retired to their respective chambers, in order to make some little changes in their apparel, as the brilliant saloons were to be presently thrown open for the reception of company. Ciprina was the first to finish her toilet for the *soirée*; and she sauntered, as was often her wont, into the picture-gallery. A few minutes afterwards she was joined there by the Marchioness, who said with a smile, "I often find you in this place, Ciprina."

"Yes, my dear Lucrezia," responded the younger lady. "You know that I am an admirer of the fine arts—that is to say, in everything which represents the delightful and the agreeable: but I abhor the fearful and the horrible!"

"And you find little or nothing of the fearful or the horrible in this gallery," observed the Marchioness. "I am like you, my dear friend: I cannot bear contemplating disagreeable objects, when there are so many pleasant ones on which the eyes may rest. If I had my own way, every painted scene should be light and sunny—every poem should be exhilarating and joyous, or else pathetic and tender; and every novel or romance——"

"Should be *entirely* romance, my dear Lucrezia," said Ciprina, with a smile,—"*all* the incidents flowing pleasantly—the atmosphere being of a roscate tint—so that none of the stern realities of life could possibly enter into the narrative."

"Well, my dear Ciprina," said the Marchioness,—"and why not delude oneself as much as possible with the idea that life's pathway is for the most part strown with roses which have no thorns, and that there is no gall in the cup of sweets which we raise to our lips?"

"Ah!" said Ciprina, "if we could indeed for ever cradle our imaginations in such dreams as those, with what soft ecstatic feelings might existence glide on! But no—it is impossible! There are thorns concealed beneath the loveliest roses; and there is gall at the bottom of the most honeyed sup!"

As these observations were made with a serious-

ness mingled even with a mournfulness, which Ciprina was but little accustomed to display, the Marchioness gazed upon her in astonishment.

"Such language as this," she exclaimed, "from the lips of the softly joyous Ciprina—the sensuously refined, the voluptuously exquisite votary of pleasure!"

"Thoughts of other times and other circumstances will now and then intervene," said Ciprina. "It is the old story over again,—the rose and the thorns—the honey and the gall! No human existence can possibly flow onward like an unruffled stream glancing in the sunlight. Do we want illustrations? Surely our own lives must furnish them. Let us look back for a period of eight or nine months—and our recollections will settle upon incidents of a painful character. I acquired a handsome, elegant, and amiable lover one day, to hear that he was a murderer the next;—and you at the same time lost the young page of whom you were so fond!"

"Ah, poor Giulio!" said Lucrezia di Mirano with a sigh.

"Well, we will not discourse on unpleasant topics," observed Ciprina. "Look, my dear friend! how beautifully the light falls upon that picture, which, as you know, I always call the portrait of yourself!"

The two ladies stopped short in front of the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia; and the Marchioness might indeed well have been taken for the original of the picture, instead of there being a mere accidental resemblance between the two. The portrait represented Lucrezia Borgia just as history and tradition have described her,—invested with the most admirable beauty—with light hair flowing in a myriad of Hyperion ringlets—blue eyes, soft and sensuous in their expression—and an exquisitely fair complexion. The bust was depicted as being of superb contours, which seemed actually to be glowing and swelling out of the very canvass itself, like the bosom of the Marchioness from its corsage. And then that slightly voluptuous expression in the configuration of the mouth and the softly rounded chin, as displayed in the portrait, was precisely the same on the countenance of the Marchioness. Both the picture and the lady impressed one with the idea of glowing passions veiled beneath a gloss of the most exquisite refinement,—delicacy and softness of manner more than half concealing a nature susceptible of the utmost ardour,—a winning fascination—a sweetness blending with feminine dignity—all serving as a mask to hide the volcanic disposition which could in a moment blaze up with the most frenzied desires. And Oh! how utterly impossible it was for any one to gaze upon that portrait or lady without experiencing soft attractions and delicious raptures taking possession of the soul,—so that the same influence was shed by the painted canvass glowing with the artist's richest colouring, and by the lady glowing in the warmth of the living flesh and blood—by the representation of Lucrezia Borgia and by the real presence of Lucrezia Mirano!

Thus, exquisitely beautiful and bewitchingly handsome looked the Marchioness, as she stood before the portrait which, so far as the lineaments went, might have been deemed her prototype. And Ciprina herself—how looked she on this par-

ticular evening of which we are writing? As radiantly perfect in her own particular style of beauty as Lucrezia was in her's. If the blue eyes of the Marchioness seemed to swim in a luminous fluid, impassioned and tender like the light of a summer-day mellowed towards the setting of the sun,—so were the large dark orbs of her young friend full of fire in their depths, but subdued in their glances by the languor which was associated with her sensuous nature. If there was a dazzling polish on Lucrezia's skin, so white, and of the purity of Carrara marble,—so was there a half-shining animation on the delicate brunette complexion of Ciprina. If it might be said that the Marchioness had ivory instead of teeth, so of Ciprina it would be said that they were pearls which shone between the moist vermilion of the lips. If Lucrezia's form might be described as a superb and glowing assemblage of admirable contours—so with equal accuracy it might be affirmed that Ciprina's figure was an exquisite perfection of more delicately rounded proportions. If Lucrezia's corsage seemed ready to burst with the heaving of the splendid richness of the bust at every respiration which she drew, or with each successive emotion,—so might it be said that the half-exposed bosom of Ciprina was ready to swell into completest self-development if the heart within were only excited with the passion which at the moment lay dormant there. And then too, if while contemplating the magnificent Marchioness, the eye might behold the flesh firm, elastic, voluptuous to the touch as to the look, like the flesh of those golden-haired and luxurious Bacchanals of Rubens,—so it might seem that with Ciprina all the first freshness of youth was still preserved, and that the young lady of nineteen, though having already plunged deep in pleasure and amorous enjoyments, was the same in her unmarred beauty as when only fifteen or sixteen summers had passed over her head. The arms of both were modelled to the finest proportions,—those of the Marchioness seeming as if they were sculptured in a white marble with the softest tint of the rose upon it,—those of Ciprina appearing as if they had caught the gentlest, faintest, and most distant reflection of a tinge of bistre. Thus, to see these two women together, with some half-dozen years' difference in their ages, it would be difficult for the most hypercritical voluptuary to decide whether he preferred the elder one in the more gorgeous development of beauty, or the younger one whose charms seemed yet to await a more expanded luxuriance.

But let us resume the thread of our narrative. Ciprina directed the attention of the Marchioness to the beauty of the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia in the light which now fell upon it; and they both stopped short in front of that exquisite painting. But as the Marchioness gazed up at it, a shade gradually came over her countenance; and Ciprina, observing it, said, "Ah, my dear friend! methinks it is now your turn to appear somewhat mournful!"

"I mournful? Oh, no, Ciprina!"—and a musical peal of merriment rang forth in silver harmony from Lucrezia di Mirano.

"Ah! perhaps," said Ciprina, "you were for a moment seized with a misgiving such as you have on several occasions mentioned—I mean lest

you should become in character and in deeds equal to her who is the prototype of your form?"

"Misgiving? No! no!" said the Marchioness hastily. "I do not think that I ever had an actual misgiving on the point. But come, Ciprina—let us hasten to the saloons; for I hear the roll of carriages, and our guests are arriving."

The two ladies accordingly repaired to the splendid suite of apartments, which by this time were thrown open; and shortly afterwards the company began to pour in. It was a brilliant assemblage that night. Dancing commenced in one room, while the card-tables were set in another; and in a third there was a *conversazione*, which was speedily carried on with all that mingled spirit and exquisite refinement—that blending of the grave and the gay, which was neither too serious on the one hand nor too frivolous on the other—which can alone be found in the saloons of Italian fashion.

While some new arrivals were being introduced, amongst the names thus loudly announced from the gilded portals of the principal saloon, was that of the Count of Ramorino. This was the Chief of the Police—a dignitary exercising high Ministerial functions, and who had long been one of the most constant frequenters of the entertainments given by the Marchioness. He was a fine tall man, in his fortieth year—with dark hair and eyes—and with features which in their profile were handsome, but their expression was somewhat sinister, as if they had derived their air from the special nature of his avocations. It had been rumoured that he was a great admirer of the Marchioness—that he had sought her favours, and had even gone so far as to offer his hand in marriage—but that he had failed to please her ladyship to a degree sufficient to win the former, while in respect to the latter she was by no means likely to exchange the freedom of an independent widow for the shackles of matrimony. Nevertheless, to whatsoever extent the hopes of the Count of Ramorino had been already disappointed, very certain was it that the Marchioness now advanced to receive him with marked distinction and courtesy.

"You are welcome, my lord," she said with one of her sweetest smiles,—*"most welcome!"* she added, in a lower tone but with a more pointed emphasis.

The Count bowed, and raised to his lips the fair hand that was proffered him.

"Your ladyship is ever charming," he said; "but you look more than usually lovely this evening. I would that our superlative expressions admitted the superlative degree for themselves, so that I might find adequate language wherein to express the rapture with which your presence inspires me."

The Marchioness again smiled, as she said, "Ever complimentary, my lord! But those who are always flattering, cannot expect their florid language to be received as earnest."

"And yet I swear to your ladyship," he said, "that I am *most* earnest when addressing myself in such a strain to you. Ah! that you would afford me some opportunity of proving the devotion I experience for you, beautiful Lucrezia!"

"Indeed, my lord!" she ejaculated, with another smile. "But, by the bye," she immediately added, as if a reminiscence had just struck her, "methinks that a day or two ago I did venture

to specify some little matter in which your lordship could oblige me——"

"A mere trifle!" responded the noble; "and yet it was not lost sight of. No! for your simplest wishes must ever prove paramount commands with me."

"You have done, then, my lord, the little favour that I asked of you?" said the Marchioness inquiringly.

"It is done," rejoined Ramorino. "My agents found the man out—he was hiding himself somewhat—for doubtless he thought that as a Neapolitan rebel, he might find it difficult to be harboured in the Tuscan States, seeing that our Government is on the most friendly terms with that of his Majesty of Naples."

"And then too," added the Marchioness, "the presence of such firebrands in any one Italian State, is dangerous to the peace of all Italy. But what have you done with this man?"

"He has received orders to quit Florence in twenty-four hours, and the Tuscan territories in three days," rejoined Ramorino. "Your ladyship told me that he came to you with an insolent bearing——"

"Yes," said the Marchioness; "and although I made every possible allowance, considering that the unfortunate man might well be excited on account of the death of his son who was assassinated by some highway robber, eight or nine months ago, as perhaps your lordship may remember——"

"I think that I do just bear the matter in mind," said the Count. "But however, it is not to be borne that this man should come and speak insolently to your ladyship, as if you had not done all that lay in your power at the time to investigate the circumstances of the youth's death."

"The poor creature is to be pitied," said the Marchioness; "but still, as your lordship very justly observes, it could not be endured that a dangerous and desperate character, such as this Paoli notoriously is, should be hanging about at the gates of my mansion."

"Certainly not," interjected the Minister of Police. "He will trouble your ladyship no more; for to-morrow he must bid farewell to Florence. And now, beautiful Lucrezia, must I ever sigh and hope in vain?" continued Ramorino, throwing into his countenance the most tender look it was capable of expressing: "or will you have pity upon me?"

The Marchioness bent down her eyes for a few moments, and then raising them slowly, she said in an under-tone, "You are irresistible, my dear Count! On the third day hence, I shall be alone at my villa in the Vale of Arno—alone, do you understand me?—and thither may you come!"

The Count bent upon her a look full of rapacious significance; and gliding away, he joined a group of gentlemen assembled at a little distance, while the Marchioness proceeded to welcome fresh arrivals.

About an hour had elapsed after the assemblage of the guests; and it was now between nine and ten o'clock, when a servant entered the room where the Marchioness was seated—the centre of a galaxy of elegant young men and beautiful ladies; and he whispered in the ear of his mistress, "May it please your ladyship, that man who

has called twice before, earnestly requests a few minutes' conversation."

"Ah!" said the Marchioness, also speaking in an under-tone; "at this hour! Did you not say that I was engaged?"

"Yes, my lady," was the lacquey's response: "but he said that it was urgent as he must leave Florence early to-morrow morning."

"Ah! then I will see him," said the Marchioness. "Show him to some room where we may converse undisturbed."

The domestic bowed and retired. None of the guests caught a syllable of the little hastily whispered colloquy which thus passed between Lucrezia di Mirano and her servant: they thought that the man had merely entered to receive some instructions in respect to the arrangements of the evening, or perhaps the details of the supper-table:—for who in all Florence gave banquets alike so sumptuous and refined, so varied and so delicate as the wealthy mistress of that palatial mansion?

The Marchioness at once glided back again, with all the ease of a well-bred woman, into the general discourse which was passing around her; and several sparkling sallies of wit thrown off like sparks momentarily stricken from an anvil, bore testimony to her brilliant intelligence. Then, at the expiration of a few minutes, she rose and issued from the room. On the landing outside she found the domestic who had brought her the message; and she inquired, "Where is this person?"

"I have shown him to the picture-gallery, may it please your ladyship," was the reply: "for I thought that at this hour none of the guests were likely to enter thither."

Lucrezia made no further observation, but proceeded to the picture-gallery, slightly waving her hand as a token that she dispensed with the attendance of the domestic who was about to accompany her thither for the purpose of opening the door. She entered that gallery, where she found the individual who craved an audience, pacing to and fro.

This man—who, we may as well at once observe, was Signor Paoli—made a low obeisance to the Marchioness, whose countenance wore an expression of the deepest sympathy and commiseration.

"I know not," began Paoli, "how to apologise sufficiently to your ladyship for this intrusion, at such an hour, and while your palatial mansion is brilliant with the lustre that indicates an assemblage of guests. But Oh! so dark and dismal is my heart—the heart of a bereaved parent——"

"Offer no apologies, signor," interrupted the Marchioness; "it is my duty as a Christian to make all possible allowances for you. What can I now do for you?"

"Oh! your ladyship is most kind!" said poor Paoli, the tears running down his cheeks; "and never can I sufficiently blame myself for the inexperience of my department at our first interview, when I vowed that there should be the most searching investigation——"

"But you saw full well, my friend," interrupted the Marchioness, "that it was through no regard for your threats that I gave you a certain piece of information?"



"Oh, no, my lady!" ejaculated Paoli, "you behaved most considerably — most generously! But when you breathed the name of him whom you know to be the murderer of my son—and when you enjoined me to such strict secrecy in the meantime, until you had leisure to give me fuller particulars—I ventured to entertain the hope that you would not delay——"

"I told you at the time," interrupted Lucrezia, "that the wretched young man, Edgar Marcellin, confessed the deed to me in a moment of desperation; and that I, overcome by horror, suffered him to escape from the house. Afterwards, when I would have sent the requisite information to the police, he had fled—he was gone! It was then useless to give publicity to a fact which would only have proved of the utmost annoyance to the many noble and distinguished families by whom he had been received, and into whose bosom he had been

admitted. Now, Signor Paoli, what more can I do?"

"On the second occasion when I took the liberty of calling on your ladyship," was the reply, "and when I asked for the particulars respecting the confession made to you by the wretched murderer, you declared that you had not then time to enter upon the narrative. I have now called for the third time to beseech that your ladyship will spare a bereaved father half-an-hour from the society of your guests, to tell him everything which you may be enabled to impart. I am an unfortunate man—one who is proscribed on account of his sentiments and doctrines! Persecution even assails me here, in Florence—and by a decree of the police I must quit the city to-morrow."

"Indeed?" ejaculated the Marchionessa, with an air of surprise. "Is this so?"

"Alas, it is only too true, my lady!" replied the

Neapolitan refugee, who gave the Marchioness credit for the most genuine sympathy. "Therefore, lady, for the last time do I stand in your presence,—beseeching you to give me the minute details of all that is within your knowledge relative to the foul murder of my beloved Giulio. That the villain Edgar Marcellin was the assassin of the unfortunate boy, there can indeed be no doubt!—for even apart from the statement made to me by your ladyship, there are circumstances——"

"Yes—circumstances?" said the Marchioness. "To what do you allude?"

"So soon as I had received from your ladyship's lips the announcement that Edgar Marcellin was the assassin, I made inquiries—I found that Marcellin had indeed disappeared abruptly from Florence the very day after the crime was perpetrated——"

"And thus, Signor Paoli," interjected the Marchioness, "you have obtained the fullest corroboration of the statement I made to you. What more can you require? what more can I do for you? I have really no additional information to impart—there are but few details connected with the case. At all events they may be summed up in half-a-dozen words. I knew that Marcellin had been to call at my villa in the Vale of Arno on the particular evening when your unfortunate son lost his life: I likewise knew that Marcellin had a bitter spite against him, and that he had threatened to wreak it. Thus, when I heard that Giulio was no more, I put all circumstances together—I abruptly taxed Marcellin with the crime—he was taken off his guard—and he confessed it. That is all. And now again, I ask, what will you do? Marcellin is not in this country—a rumour did reach me some months ago that immediately upon his return to France after fleeing from Florence, he became involved in some political trouble and was forced to fly from Paris——"

"I will seek him all over the world!" exclaimed Paoli: "I will never rest until I have found him! By some means or another the death of my unfortunate son shall be avenged!"

"It is not in Italy that you will find your son's murderer," said the Marchioness; "and therefore it were indeed useless for you to tarry any longer in Florence, even though the Minister of Police had not sent you the mandate to depart. And now tell me, signor—speak frankly—are your means limited?—for if it be so, my purse is at your service."

"Words are inadequate to express the sense of gratitude which I experience for all the proofs of kindness which your ladyship is bestowing upon me. Indebted to friends in England for the means of coming to Florence——"

"You shall now be indebted to a friend in Florence," interjected the Marchioness, "for the means of visiting every capital in Europe in search of the murderer Edgar Marcellin. Here—take this purse. Nay, be not afraid——"

"But 'tis heavy, lady," said Paoli; "it contains naught but gold—far more than I shall need for my purposes!"

"Take it, take it!" exclaimed the Marchioness; "and if hereafter you may need a friend hesitate not to apply to me. Retire now as discreetly as

you have come to my mansion. Ah! let me observe that you did well from the very first not to give the name of Paoli when presenting yourself at the portals; for 'tis better that the domestics should not know you."

The refugee bowed—again expressed his gratitude—and took his departure.

The Marchioness returned to the brilliantly-lighted saloon, from which she had not been altogether half-an-hour absent; and no one could tell by her countenance that she had just passed through a scene at all calculated to excite or perturb her. She again mingled amongst her guests—and the wit again sparkled upon her lips like wine on the brim of a coral cup. Her eyes shed bright beams all around; and every one thought that never had the Marchioness di Mirano appeared more brilliant and ravishing in her beauty!—never had she so well performed the part of the courteous hostess!

It might have been some half-hour, or perhaps three-quarters, after Lucrezia di Mirano had thus returned into the midst of the brilliant company whom she had gathered at her mansion, when all of a sudden the whole assemblage was startled by the cracking of one of the window-panes; and a missile of some sort came flying into the room. It hit violently against an immense chandelier, shivering some of the glass pendants, and shaking the whole so that for a few moments the rattling din resounded through the saloon;—and the missile fell near a sofa on the opposite side. Ejaculations of astonishment and indignation burst from many lips—there were some half-stifled shrieks on the part of the ladies—while the Minister of Police exclaimed, "By heaven! this is an outrage which must be signally punished!"

But what was the missile? It had happened to fall at Ciprina's feet: she picked it up—it was a purse! Yes—a purse! And now fresh ejaculations of surprise pealed forth from the lips of many.

"And the purse is filled with gold!" exclaimed a lady who sat next to Ciprina.

"But whose purse can it be?" asked another.

"Methinks I ought to recognise it," said Ciprina. "Yes—there is no doubt!—'tis my friend Lucrezia's purse!"

"What! her ladyship's?" ejaculated several voices.

"The Marchioness di Mirano's purse?" cried others: and in the twinkling of an eye Ciprina was surrounded by a large number of the company present.

"Yes, indeed—it is my purse," said the Marchioness, advancing towards Ciprina—and the group of guests at once made respectful way for her ladyship. "It is my purse, as my friend has declared unto you. Just now I descended into one of the conservatories—I will be candid enough to confess that it was to point out which particular fruit I chose should figure upon the table this evening; and I was so pleased with the head gardener's evident attention to the contents of the hothouse, that I took out my purse to reward him. I must then have left it lying in the conservatory;—but who could possibly have perpetrated such an outrage as this? It is impossible to conjecture—unless indeed it be some underling——"

"No—that is scarcely probable," interjected an elderly lady; "for the underling would most likely have self-appropriated the purse instead of adopting such singular means to restore it."

"It is a mystery which cannot at present be fathomed," said the Marchioness; "and I beg that it may not disturb the harmony of the evening—"

"It was intended as an insult," exclaimed the Minister of Police; "that is only too clear! I will go and issue orders to the first patrol of *abinieri* that I meet—"

"My dear Count, do nothing of the sort," said the Marchioness. "I will to-morrow investigate the matter; and if the culprit be discovered, rest assured that he shall be punished. Come, my friends—let no more be said upon the subject; but let the amusements of the evening continue.—Count," added the Marchioness, with one of her most affable smiles, "are you not about to offer me your hand that we may open the next dance together?"

"With the utmost delight," responded Ramorino. "But first of all your ladyship has forgotten to take the purse which the Signora Ciprina has been for the last three minutes proffering you."

"Ah, indeed!" said the Marchioness: "I did not observe my sweet friend's kind attention."

She smilingly approached Ciprina; but as the young lady placed the purse in the hand of the Marchioness, she felt that this hand was as cold as that of death. Ciprina was for an instant startled—she flung a quick glance of anxious inquiry upon Lucrezia's countenance; but there was nothing there to corroborate the idea that any sinister circumstances were attached to this incident of the purse.

The Marchioness now accompanied the Count of Ramorino to the upper part of the saloon, so that they might take their place at the head of the dance. As they proceeded thither, Lucrezia leant upon the Count's arm; so that his hand came not in contact with hers until the commencement of the dance; and in the meanwhile the Marchioness had drawn on her elegant white kid glove, so elastic and tight-fitting, which displayed the beautiful formation of that hand with its symmetry of long tapering fingers.

CHAPTER III.

THE PURSE.

WE must now return to Signor Paoli, whom we left at the moment when he was about to take his departure from the picture-gallery of the Mirano mansion. His heart was full of gratitude towards the Marchioness; and he wiped the tears from his eyes, as he thought of the kind tone in which she had addressed him and the compassionating looks which she had bent upon him, even more than the proof of her substantial liberality which he retained in his possession.

On issuing from the picture-gallery Paoli rapidly traversed the landing, and began the descent of the staircase with which it communicated. This was not the grand staircase, which was used only

by those who had access to the brilliantly-lighted saloons; but both led down into the same place—namely, the court-yard of the mansion, which was built in a quadrangular form. On reaching the bottom of the staircase, Paoli was about to place his fingers upon the handle of the door leading into the court-yard, when that door was abruptly opened: and a man muffled in a cloak made his appearance. This man, whose countenance was almost completely concealed by that muffling mantle, was about to beat a hasty retreat as if he had not expected to meet any one there,—when the glimpse he caught of Paoli's features as abruptly made him alter his intention. He stopped short as if in surprise: indeed an ejaculation expressive of that feeling burst from his lips:—and then he advanced completely into the lobby whence the flight of stairs ascended. A strong light was burning in this vestibule, so that the cloaked individual had no difficulty in at once discerning Signor Paoli's features; and it was evident that he recognised them, by the way in which he had altered his purpose and had remained instead of beating a retreat, and also by the ejaculation which had burst from his lips. But on the other hand, Paoli could only distinguish a pair of bright eyes within the folds of the muffling *roquetairé*; yet it was evident that by the handsome style of this mantle, and whatever other portions of its wearer's dress were visible, that he belonged to the genteel order of society.

"Ah, you here!" said the cloaked stranger, thus singularly apostrophising Paoli. "But I ought not to be astonished—"

"And who may you be, signor?" inquired Paoli, surprised at the other's conduct. "You appear to know me? Were it not therefore well—or at least consistent with a becoming courtesy—if you were to remove the cape of that mantle from your countenance, and afford me a chance of ascertaining whether or not the recognition may be mutual?"

"Listen to me for a few moments, ere I reveal my countenance," said the cloaked stranger. "You may or may not know me—I am not certain. But if you do recognise me, give vent to no word too loudly spoken—and make no gesture which may lead to a trampling of feet.—In short, signor, be circumspect and cautious, as if your very life depended upon it!—for I have matters of the utmost importance to reveal unto your knowledge."

The idea had for a moment flitted through Paoli's brain that accident had brought him in contact with some unfortunate creature who was deprived of his reason; but this opinion quickly changed as he marked the serious, collected, and earnest manner in which the stranger was speaking. He therefore said, "If everything be fair on your part, rest assured that there shall be nothing indiscreet on mine."

"Tis well," said the stranger. "I know you to be a man of energy—or you would not have embarked in that cause which led to your exile from the Neapolitan territory. You see that I fully know you!"

"I see it," observed Paoli. "But it matters not: for even if you were an enemy, you could do me no harm. We are in a neutral State!"

"Do you harm?" ejaculated the stranger, as if

pained by the idea: "I would do you all earthly good if it were in my power! At all events I am your friend—Oh, believe me! I am your friend!—and I seek your friendship in return. But tell me if I am known unto you?"

The stranger now let fall the cape which he had gathered high up beneath the brim of his hat, and which he had held over his countenance so as almost completely to conceal it. Now, as he revealed that countenance, Signor Paoli contemplated it for upwards of a minute, vainly searching in his memory to ascertain whether he had ever beheld it before. But at length he shook his head, saying, "I do not know you, signor. Are you an Italian? Methinks not. Your appearance—your accent——"

"No—I am not an Italian," was the response. "But come hither with me!—we must not remain in this vestibule, where at any moment we may be disturbed!"

The stranger was advancing towards the back part of the vestibule, when Paoli stopped him, saying, "Signor, I cannot follow you to any inner part of these premises. I am bound for many reasons to leave them at once. I owe the Marchioness a debt of gratitude——"

"Ah! you think so!"—and strange indeed was the look which accompanied this ejaculation on the part of the unknown.

"Your conduct is altogether so singular—so unaccountable," observed Paoli, "that unless you at once give me sufficient reason to believe that you have veritably matters of importance to communicate, I shall beg that our interview may here at once end."

"No—it cannot end: but it shall be as you desire," said the stranger; "and you shall receive at once the proof that I have matters of importance to communicate. I am——start not! give vent to no ejaculation! attempt no violence!—I am Edgar Marcellin!"

Paoli, despite the injunction he had received, literally bounded as if he were galvanized; and then—still despite all those opposite injunctions—a cry was about to peal forth from his lips and his arms were stretching forth that his hands might clutch the supposed murderer of his son, when Edgar said with a peremptoriness of tone that produced an instantaneous effect, "Peace! be still! I know what you think:—you are deceived! Reflect for a moment! If I were a murderer, should I have thus revealed myself unto you?"

Paoli was at once smitten with the justice and plausibility of the words that thus smote his ear; and he said, "Good heavens! is it possible? You innocent!"

"Yes, innocent!" rejoined Edgar. "And I am here in Florence to bring the guilty one to justice! Now will you follow my counsel?—will you act as I demand? Come with me!"

Paoli had within the last few minutes passed through such transitions of feeling, that he was now bewildered and confused—almost stupefied; so that he was as it were an automaton to be directed by the will of the young Frenchman. At the end of the vestibule there was a glass door; and this Edgar Marcellin at once proceeded to open by means of a key which he had about him. A passage—which was only dimly lighted, inas-

much as it belonged to a part of the building which was little frequented at that hour—terminated in another door, which Marcellin also opened by means of the same key. This door led into the gardens belonging to the mansion, and which stretched to the next street, from which these grounds were separated by a boundary-wall. Paoli was closely following Edgar Marcellin, who had taken care to re-lock the doors through which they passed, as already described.

"Come this way!" said Marcellin, hurrying his companion forward to an avenue of evergreens, in the shade of which they might be completely secluded from the view of any one who should happen to traverse the garden.

The windows of the brilliantly-lighted saloons looked upon the pleasure-grounds: the roseate lustre was streaming forth through the crimson draperies; and the sounds of music were wafted to the ears of the Frenchman and the Neapolitan as they walked together in that avenue. Paoli longed to ask questions—but he curbed his curiosity: he had still to receive proofs that Edgar Marcellin was not the murderer of his son—and therefore he chose not to make the slightest approach towards familiar discourse until he should be thoroughly convinced on this point.

"We have much to talk about, signor," began Edgar Marcellin. "But let me in the first instance reiterate the solemn assurance that I am as innocent as you yourself are of your son's death!"

"Then you know who his murderer was?" said Paoli in a hollow voice; and the next instant he gasped with the emotion which was excited by the painful topic.

"Yes—I know," responded Edgar, "whose hand it was that levelled the fatal weapon which dealt death to the unfortunate Giulio! But let us in the first place enter upon a few explanations. I knew you by sight, because some months ago I dwelt in the same street as yourself and your family in the British metropolis—it was in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square——"

"What! do I remember aright?" interrupted Paoli. "You wore a beard and moustache then——"

"Yes," rejoined Edgar. "And now bear with me patiently while I tell you——But in the first instance learn that I have lately been restored to my country—I am once more rich——"

"And to what is all this to lead?" demanded Paoli, somewhat impatiently.

"To the avowal that I love your daughter Corinna——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Paoli, with increasing astonishment. "You know her, then?"

"I know her—I have long known her!—and with your consent, she shall become my bride! Ten days ago I parted from her—it was at Sidney Villa—and I then vowed that I would come straight to Florence, not merely to prove the black falsity of the hideous accusation levelled against myself, but likewise to enable you to avenge the death of your son Giulio! Scarcely an hour has elapsed since I arrived in the Tuscan capital. I at once proceeded to your lodgings, according as your address was indicated in the letter which you wrote to Miss Evelyn; but you were not at home. I was determined not to allow the

grass to grow under my feet—I accordingly came hither—”

“But why came you to the Mirano mansion?” demanded Paoli. “Know you not that it is the Marchioness herself who accuses you of the murder of my son?”

“I know it—or at least I conjectured that it must have been she who made that statement so foul—so false unto your ears!”—and Edgar spoke sternly and emphatically.

“Good heavens, what would you have me understand?” exclaimed Paoli, now more bewildered than ever. “Your tone—your accents, even more than your words, seem to imply a counter accusation—Oh, unhappy young man! or rather execrable villain that you are—”

“Peace, signor!—peace!” exclaimed Edgar fiercely and sternly. “Can you not for a moment curb your passion? Listen!—I command you to listen! I came to this mansion in order to bring the guilt home to the murderers—”

“Murderers?” echoed Paoli, literally shivering with the cold tremor that struck him at the horrible idea. “No, no! it is impossible!”

“I tell you that it is true!” ejaculated Edgar vehemently. “Yes—as there is a God above us, the hand which dealt death to your son was that of Lucrezia Mirano!”

Though this announcement was made unaccompanied by a single word of proof, and unassociated with a syllable of corroborative evidence, yet was there so unmistakable a sincerity in the tone and manner of the young Frenchman, that Paoli was smitten with as strong a conviction as if the truth of the averment had been established by a dozen credible witnesses. But he was confounded—his tongue was paralyzed—he had stopped short in the avenue of evergreens—and his feet were riveted to the spot.

“Yes,” quickly resumed Edgar Marcellin; “Lucrezia Mirano was the assassin of your unfortunate son! For Giulio was her paramour—Ah! you know not all the wickedness of that woman who under the shape of an angel, conceals the heart of a demoness! With the features of Lucrezia Borgia, she has all the volcanic passions, the fierce desires, and the vindictive instincts of the Borgia also! Signor, there is not much time for explanation. Suffice it for you to know that your daughter, the beautiful Corinna—and her amiable friend Miss Evelyn—are fully convinced of my innocence. Yes—and they entertain not the remotest doubt of the guilt of the Marchioness of Mirano! The lips of one of her own maidens—a certain Lisetta who was here at the time of the tragedy, but who for many months past has been living in England—the lips of that young female, I repeat, gave such intelligence to your daughter and to Miss Evelyn as thoroughly to acquit me and to bring the guilt home to the proper quarter!”

“Ah, vile hypocrite of a Marchioness!” ejaculated Paoli; “I begin to comprehend it all now! Oh, for revenge! But Ah! to-morrow I am to leave Florence—a decree of the police, peremptorily delivered by one of the confidential agents of Count Ramorino himself—”

“Ah! is it thus that the Marchioness is now working?” exclaimed Edgar.

“What mean you?” inquired Paoli.

“That Count Ramorino has long been a fre-

quenter of the saloons of the Marchioness. Whether he be amongst the list of her lovers or not I cannot tell; but very confident am I that one word breathed from her lips in his ear, would procure an order for the extradition of every Neapolitan refugee in Florence.”

“Oh, the hypocrite!” cried Paoli. “And yet she seemed to sympathize so naturally—But tell me, signor, are you not afraid to come hither thus?—are you not running fearful risks?”

“Not such great risks as you may fancy,” rejoined Edgar. “From Lisetta I have received a complete plan of the mansion; and during my journey I have studied it so well that I am now as familiar with it as the Marchioness herself. Besides, I had previously a tolerable idea of its various arrangements; for I used to be a constant visitor within its walls. But this is not all. I hear in my mind which different set of locks may be opened by the same key—”

“But the keys themselves?” said Paoli: “how did you procure them?”

“Oh! in England,” responded Edgar, “there are makers of what are called skeleton-keys; and in pursuance of the hints received from Lisetta, I furnished myself with those little implements which may be as useful to the man seeking to vindicate his character as to the lurking thief and midnight burglar. Then, I knew that if I entered the mansion by the particular vestibule where you and I met, I should pass unquestioned—and that the more I concealed my countenance, the better the effect would be if I happened to meet any of her ladyship’s domestics—”

“Ah, I understand!” exclaimed Paoli: “the profligate Marchioness is accustomed to receive her lovers by that staircase?”

“You have rightly conjectured,” rejoined Marcellin. “And now, Signor Paoli, return you to your lodgings—I will join you there anon—”

“Oh! let us go at once,” cried the Neapolitan, “and denounce the murderess to the authorities!”

“Impossible!” said Marcellin: “it cannot be done thus! I have not evidence—there are a thousand things wanting—links in the chain of testimony—”

“And after all she may escape!” ejaculated Paoli, in a voice of mingled rage and anguish: “she may escape!—justice may be defrauded of its due—and Giulio’s murder may be unavenged!”

“In the name of heaven excite not yourself thus!” exclaimed Edgar Marcellin. “Be reasonable!—be reasonable, I entreat you!”

“Reasonable?” echoed Paoli, who seemed to be suddenly animated with a degree of passion that was rising to madness. “Who could be reasonable under such circumstances? My son—my beloved son! the good, the beautiful boy! ruthlessly, barbarously murdered! Oh, methinks that he is now before my eyes!—methinks that his shade is invoking vengeance!”

“And if vengeance you would have, signor,” interrupted Marcellin, “pray adopt the proper course to ensure it! I tell you that there are certain things to be done—I have not now time to tell you what those things are—nor to sketch out my plan of proceeding—”

“Oh, but it is for me to act!” exclaimed Paoli. “I beseech you, let me bear my part in those

proceedings, whatever they may be! Remember that it is my son who is to be avenged!"

"And he shall be avenged!" cried Marcellin. "I have sworn it to Corinna—I swear it now to you! The Marchioness——"

"Oh, the Marchioness! The vile wretch!" ejaculated Paoli: "to affect to bestow her sympathy on me! And now I understand it all! Yes—yes—I can read her insidious conduct! Ah! and this gold which she gave me! Oh, as a gift it was indeed a worthy sequence to her vile stratagem in procuring an order for my extradition!"

"Gold?" said Marcellin: "did she give you gold?"

"Yes!—doubtless to ensure the certainty of my departure from the Tuscan capital! She knew that the Minister of Police might fulminate the mandate ordering me to flee: but if the feathers were wanting wherewith to accomplish such flight——"

"Do you not see, my good friend," asked Marcellin, "how wily is this woman, and what an amount of caution must be used in dealing with her? I beseech you, leave it all in my hands!"

"Yes, my young friend—it shall be left in your hands! do as you think fit! Come to me with the announcement that justice will have its due, and I shall embrace you! But, Oh! this gold—this gold! it seems to be an intolerable weight! it seems to be a bribe purchasing my connivance at the death of my beloved son! Happen what will, I must relieve myself of the burden!"

Having thus spoken, it was in a species of frenzy that the Neapolitan refugee rushed out of the avenue of evergreens and sped fleet as an arrow towards that side of the mansion which looked upon the pleasure-grounds. Edgar Marcellin, utterly at a loss to conceive what Paoli purposed to do, and horribly frightened lest he should by some act of madness compromise himself—compromise everything also—darted in pursuit. But Paoli went onward as if it were a mere stripling, lithe and agile, that was coursing along the gravel walks—rushing over the parterres, and bounding amidst the bushes. Right underneath the long array of shining casements on the first floor did Paoli suddenly stop short; and then, with all the vehemence of the most fiery indignation, he sent the purse whizzing and spinning from his hand as if it were a missile projected from a sling.

The reader has already seen the effect which it produced throughout the saloon into the midst of which it burst; and no sooner was the crash of the glass heard, when Paoli was suddenly smitten with an idea of the rashness of the proceeding.

"Madman!" ejaculated Edgar Marcellin; "what have you done? Come quick! come quick!"

Once more was the Neapolitan refugee reduced to the condition of an automaton in the hands of the young Frenchman. Edgar, though fearfully excited, lost not his presence of mind. He fancied that there might be a quick search instituted throughout the grounds; he knew not how the Marchioness might take the incident; he could not possibly foresee that her own presence of mind would be so marvellous as to enable her to check everything beyond that ordinary emotion which

might seem to be the natural result of such an outrage. Therefore, he anticipated the worst. He pictured to himself the whole company rushing forth—the vast establishment of domestics pouring out into the grounds—the *sbirri* unsummoned—the entire enclosure of the gardens becoming rapidly alive with a host of indignant pursuers after the author of the proceeding. His mind was in an instant made up how to act. Fortunately the Neapolitan was now docile and pliant, ready to obey him in whatsoever he might suggest.

"This way!" he said: "quick! quick! and all will yet be well!"

Towards the boundary-wall they sped. Marcellin knew along which avenue it was expedient to hasten: he had frequently been in those gardens in the days when he was a visitor at the Mirano mansion; and he recollected where a group of trees might afford a ladder for the purpose of escape. Some of these trees projected their large boughs over the wall itself: Edgar made Paoli climb up first:—with cat-like agility he followed—and in a few moments they were in the street.

"Return to your lodgings!—haste!" he cried.

"If you reach them in safety, all will be well! Lucrezia will not dare tell the tale which shall compromise you! I will rejoin you there in the course of the night. Leave everything to me!"

The young Frenchman wrung the hand of the Neapolitan; and they separated, dashing off in different directions.

An hour afterwards Edgar Marcellin, still closely muffled in his cloak, and with his countenance concealed by the huge cape which he folded as it were beneath the brims of his hat, returned into the neighbourhood of the Mirano mansion, to ascertain, if possible, what effect the incident of the purse had produced upon the company assembled at that palatial dwelling. Skirting the exterior of the boundary-wall over which himself and Paoli had leapt, he gazed upon the array of lighted-windows. The roscate flood of lustre was still streaming forth—the sounds of music were wafted to his ear—and through the draperies his eye could just discern the figures of the dancers. He had fancied it was possible that the party might have been broken up by the occurrence of the purse; he had pictured to himself the Marchioness fainting—confusion, dismay, and bewilderment following. But no!—it did not seem as if any such serious results had ensued,—at least so far as he could judge from the fact that the entertainment was evidently progressing as if no untoward incident had interrupted it. Edgar Marcellin was, as the reader already knows, a thorough man of the world: he was shrewd and keen-witted. It therefore quickly struck him that Lucrezia had treated the occurrence with the utmost presence of mind—that suddenly feeling her position to become desperate, she had nerved herself with all her courage—and that she was all in a moment smitten with the necessity of averting suspicion for the present trusting to the chapter of accidents for the assurance of safety and security for the future.

"Therefore," said Marcellin to himself, "my plan remains as it was at the beginning, and nothing need be changed!"

He now, by means of two or three little indentations which he discovered in the wall, obtained

a footing that enabled him to scale it; and he was once more in the gardens of the Mirano mansion. He did not choose to risk a second time the peril, if any there were, of entering by the front portals and passing through the courtyard, as in the first instance he had done on this evening of which we are writing,—although, for the reasons which he had given to Signor Paoli, he did not actually think there was any very great danger in such a course. Still he adopted the safer method; and therefore, as we have just said, he scaled the wall. He walked about in the gardens for another hour, until he beheld the windows of the supper-rooms on the ground floor gorgeously illuminated, and the figures of the entering company casting their shadows upon the semi-transparent draperies.

"Now," he said, "it is time to act!"—and as he muttered these words to himself, he felt that he was nerved with the strength of an iron resolution.

Perhaps some of our readers may have all this time been wishing to know whether Edgar Marcellin had thought much of Ciprina, or whether he entertained any particular wish to see her. We will endeavour to gratify this feeling of curiosity wheresoever it may exist. Edgar was devotedly in love with Corinna Paoli; and he only thought of Ciprina as of a fashionable courtesan with whom he had indulged in a passing amour. His attachment to Corinna was sufficiently strong, genuine, and sincere, to induce him to wish to escape all temptation on the part of the syren-friend of Lucrezia di Mirano. Besides, even if his love for the refugee's daughter were less pure and chaste than it was, he had weightier purposes in his mind than that of amatory dalliance with a young lady whom for many months he had almost entirely ceased to think of. Thus Edgar Marcellin was troubling himself not at all with the image of the beautiful wanton in whose society he had passed such delicious hours and in whose charms he had revelled in the villa of the Vale of Arno, at the commencement of the year.

Having settled this point, we hope to the satisfaction of the most curious portion of our readers, we will now follow the young Frenchman in the proceedings which he entered upon, so soon as he was convinced that the tide of guests had poured from the saloons to the banquetting-suite. By means of one of the false keys which he possessed, he re-entered the mansion by the same door that some little while back had afforded egress alike for himself and the Neapolitan. The passage was threaded: he passed into the vestibule by the glass-door—a lacquy was standing there—but the man instantaneously withdrew into the courtyard in the discreetest way in the world; for he thought that it was some favoured lover of his mistress who knew full well what he was about and had the best of all possible rights to be there—namely, such rights as an amatory hint and a pass-key might have been enabled to afford. Marcellin ascended the staircase; the plan which Lisetta had given him of the interior arrangements of the mansion was vividly fresh in his memory; he therefore experienced not the slightest difficulty in finding his way to Lucrezia's boudoir. He thought it quite probable that there might be a lady's-maid or two in the bower of love; and if

such should prove the case, he had no doubt that a withdrawal would follow as discreetly as in the instance just named. But it was not so. Lights were burning in the boudoir—but no one was there.

Edgar now drew forth a small skeleton key from his pocket; and without an instant's hesitation he proceeded to open a large wardrobe which stood in an elegant toilet-chamber communicating from the boudoir, and beyond which was Lucrezia's bedroom. That wardrobe was lofty;—in its uppermost part it had an array of pegs to which several sumptuous dresses were suspended. At the bottom part was a row of drawers, which on trial proved to be locked. But Edgar was fully prepared for this circumstance: the instructions given him by Lisetta had been most carefully minute, and the keys which he possessed about his person were calculated to answer any emergency that might arise. Thus the drawers were speedily opened; and in one of them Edgar Marcellin found a pistol-case. He opened it, and beheld two pistols of most exquisite manufacture,—the handles being curiously inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

"The same, the very same!" ejaculated Edgar, the moment his eyes settled upon these weapons.

He then took up one in his hand; and after scrutinizing it for nearly a minute, he discerned a mark which seemed as if it had been made by the point of a pin on a particular part of the inlaid mother-of-pearl.

"It was this!" he muttered to himself.

He looked at the other pistol—but only for a few moments, and for curiosity's sake. He returned it to the case, which he consigned back to the drawer whence he had taken it: but the pistol which bore the mark on the mother-of-pearl he secured about his person. He then proceeded to open another drawer; and this he found to contain several valuable Cashmere shawls and other costly articles of female raiment. Edgar dived his hands down beneath these objects, as if he were searching for something else. And so in sooth he was:—nor did he search in vain; for from the very bottom of the drawer he drew forth a complete suit of male apparel, consisting of a frock-coat, a waistcoat, and pantaloons. As he unrolled these garments, which were made of dark cloth, he at once perceived that they were of the most elegant fashion; and his imagination in a moment enabled him to judge what would be the appearance of the fair one to whom the apparel belonged. He did not however linger many moments over his survey of the costume; but having satisfied himself that it was the one of which he was in search, he rolled it up in the smallest convenient compass for removal. As he was closing the drawer, he caught a glimpse of an elegant pair of patent leather Wellington boots in a corner of the wardrobe; and close by there was a hat-box which upon inspection was found to contain a lady's riding-hat, decorated with a graceful plume of feathers. But Edgar Marcellin was satisfied with possessing the suit of clothes; and having closed the wardrobe, he retreated from the dressing-chamber.

He was now again in the elegantly-furnished boudoir, on the table of which there were writing materials. He sat down, and in a feigned hand penned the following note:—

"TO THE MARCHIONESS DI MIRANO,

"Your ladyship is earnestly requested to repair to the picture-gallery so soon as the guests shall have taken their departure and the mansion shall have relapsed into tranquillity. It vitally concerns you to keep this appointment,—and not merely to keep it, but to maintain likewise the utmost caution and secrecy. The person who pens this billet, will find the means of communicating with your ladyship in the place thus appointed."

Having written these lines in a hand so completely disguised that Marcellin felt convinced the real authorship could not possibly be suspected, he folded the billet, placed it in an envelope, which he secured with sealing-wax, and then addressed it to the Marchioness. He left the letter lying upon the table, and stole forth from the boudoir, again muffled up in his spacious cloak and with the cape concealing his countenance. The picture-gallery was at no great distance; and he succeeded in reaching it unobserved by a single soul; for the Mirano mansion was vast—most of the men-servants were engaged at the time in waiting at the supper-table—and her ladyship's maids were availing themselves of the opportunity to enjoy a little feast of their own in the servants'-hall.

The picture-gallery was lighted; and Marcellin hesitated for a moment whether he should extinguish the lamps, or leave this office to be presently perceived by one of the domestics.

"If I leave them lighted, I can conceal myself behind this screen," he thought. "But then suppose that the servants should take it into their heads to make the most careful examination to ensure themselves that all is safe? I might be discovered! On the other hand, if I extinguish the lights, the domestic who may presently come in to perform that task, will most likely fancy that another servant has been beforehand with him. Yes!—'tis the safer plan!"

Having thus made up his mind how to act, Edgar Marcellin extinguished the lamps in the picture-gallery, and then threw himself upon a sofa that was behind the screen to which allusion has already been made.

The time passed heavily—languidly—wearily. Marcellin heard some adjacent church clock proclaim the hour of one: then an age seemed to follow ere the same clock struck two. But now the din of equipages in the court-yard of the mansion began to meet his ears: he heard carriage after carriage rolling out of the spacious enclosure into the street; and then at last the huge portals at the entrance were closed with a reverberating sound. A few minutes afterwards the door of the picture-gallery was opened, and a voice ejaculated in an evident tone of surprise, "Ah! already extinguished!"

Then the door was at once closed again; and the rapidly retreating steps of the domestic who had thus for a moment peeped in, fell upon the ears of Edgar Marcellin.

"Now," he thought to himself, "the moment is approaching when the murderers and I shall meet face to face!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO LUCREZIAS.

THE entertainment was over—the company had dispersed—the last of the guests had taken their leave of the noble hostess and her friend the Signora Ciprina. These two ladies now remained alone together, in the splendid saloon to which the company had returned for a parting dance after supper.

Ciprina had not lost sight of the incident of the purse; neither had she forgotten the circumstance that the hand of the Marchioness was as cold as that of death when she restored the purse to her keeping. Ciprina saw that there was something wrong—but she could not comprehend what. She did not believe a single syllable of the tale which Lucrezia had told in respect to leaving the purse behind her in the conservatory; for though this tale was told at the time with the most natural air of sincerity, yet Ciprina thought that in its construction it was clumsy, and was only such an one as could have been invented off-hand to meet a sudden emergency. Therefore Ciprina felt assured that something very disagreeable had happened in connexion with the incident of the purse; and she thought that the moment she and the Marchioness were alone together, the latter would give her some explanation. But Lucrezia said not a syllable upon the subject: she seemed to be in haste to retire to her own apartments; and she at once bade Ciprina "Good night," in the same affectionate terms which they were wont to adopt towards one another.

The Marchioness did indeed desire to be alone. The incident of the purse had filled her soul with trouble—almost with desperation. It was scarcely possible to mistake the meaning of the incident. Paoli must have by some extraordinary and unaccountable means learnt something which led him to scorn the gold given by the hand of the Marchioness. But what could he have learnt?—was it only that while speaking fairly she had been acting foully? that while affecting to compassionate him, she had been treacherously plotting for his banishment from Florence? Or was it anything of a still more serious character that he had discovered?—had he abruptly and unexpectedly stumbled upon some clue immediately after parting from her,—a clue that was leading him on in a different track from that in which she had sought to place him? She knew not what to think nor what to conjecture. It had been for her the agony of pandemonium to maintain a smiling countenance during the long hours that had elapsed since the throwing of the purse through the casement of the saloon: it was one prolonged excruciation so horrible that it was indeed no wonder if she should seek the earliest moment which was afforded her to be alone!

The Marchioness reached her boudoir, where she threw herself upon a sofa. Two lady's-maids—young and beautiful, as were all the damsels who were engaged in Lucrezia's service—at once came forth from the dressing-room to attend upon their mistress. We should observe that there were numerous handmaids in the Mirano mansion: and they kept their duly appointed turns in at



tending either upon the Marchioness or Ciprina according to the special service to which they were respectively attached.

The two handmaidens began to prepare the night-toilet of the Marchioness. One addressed herself to the task of combing out the luxuriant masses of her hair, the light golden auburn of which seemed to take different hues, or rather to develop different degrees of lustre, as the maiden took up each separate tress and ringlet, and as the light of the lamps poured down upon that superb head. The other maiden began to unfasten the brilliant gems and jewels which had added to the splendour of Lucrezia's charms at the entertainment; but little thought the girl as she lifted an elegant necklace from the glowing bosom of the Marchioness, that beneath the alabaster skin upon which the gold had rested, beat a heart blackened with crime and tortured with the most horrible feelings!

No. 55.—AGNES.

"What is that billet lying upon the table!" presently inquired Lucrezia, as her eye now for the first time caught a glimpse of the note.

"It is for your ladyship," replied one of the maidens.

"Give it me, girl. Who placed it there?" asked Lucrezia, as on glancing at the address, she perceived that it was a handwriting which was strange to her.

"I do not know, my lady," rejoined the damsel: and she glanced inquiringly at her companion.

"No—nor I, my lady," said the latter. "But Teresa and Johanna," she continued, thus alluding to two others of the handmaidens of the establishment, "arranged the toilet-chamber for the evening; and possibly it might be one of them who placed the billet there."

The Marchioness had been about to open the envelope, when she was suddenly struck by the

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fact that it was one of the kind she was accustomed to use. Another glance and she was still more deeply struck by recognising the seal which was on the top of a pedicel-case lying in the ink-standish on the boudoir-table. Had the letter been written within the walls of that boudoir? If so, who could have penetrated thither? The Marchioness was already in such a frame of mind that every incident, however trivial, became invested with importance—every circumstance at all strange seemed fraught with a suspicion. She did not therefore dare open that billet in the presence of her maidens, for fear it might contain something to produce an effect upon herself, or for fear lest the eyes of either one of them should catch a glimpse of its contents.

"You can retire, maidens," she said, adopting the same gentle and kind tone which she was wont to use towards her dependants. "I can dispense with your services for to-night. Go and seek your own chambers."

The damsels made a respectful curtsy, and withdrew from the boudoir. But in the passage outside, they exchanged significant looks, as much as to imply that they had no doubt the billet heralded the coming of some lover whose presence the Marchioness was therefore momentarily expecting.

Scarcely had the door of the boudoir closed behind those damsels, when the Marchioness tore open the billet; and her countenance became deadly pale as her eyes glanced over its contents. Not that she recognised the handwriting of Edgar Marcellin; not that she even for an instant suspected who the author of the billet might be! But it was the mystery of the occurrence which thus smote her with dread. What could the billet mean? who was its writer? Was he friend or foe?—did he purpose to aid her in the midst of the embarrassments which were thickening around her? or was his object to betray her? Or else, was it some new calamity that was about to threaten her?—or might it not be an endeavour on the part of Signor Paoli to obtain another interview with her? This idea seemed to be the most probable; and the Marchioness resolved to obey the summons and repair to the place of appointment.

"Let me at all events know the best or the worst with the least possible delay," she murmured to herself: "suspense is intolerable!"

As her maidens had begun to disapparel her previous to their abrupt dismissal from the boudoir, a portion of the elegant attire which Lucrezia had worn for the entertainment had been laid aside. Her hair was in disorder—partly combed out, partly as she had worn it during the evening. She snatched up some light loose species of morning wrapper which she hastily put on: she beheld a white veil lying near—this she caught up and threw over her head. Then she lighted a small chamber lamp, of exquisite manufacture, and the framework of which was of silver. She was about to pass forth from the boudoir, when a thought struck her. She stopped short—a very peculiar expression seized upon her countenance: it was as if a fiend had suddenly looked forth from the face of an angel! Deeply ominous—darkly sinister, was that expression; and she murmured to herself, "Yes—either for defence against

treachery—or else to strike down an avowed enemy!"

She retreated into the toilet chamber: she opened the very wardrobe the contents of which had been so recently inspected by Edgar Marcellin; and she unlocked a drawer. It was however one which he had found no occasion to open;—and thence Lucrezia di Mirano took forth a dagger. This she concealed amongst her garments; and taking up the lamp again, she issued forth from the boudoir.

In a few minutes the door of the picture-gallery was slowly and cautiously opened; and Lucrezia appeared upon the threshold. She endeavoured to plunge her looks along the vista of gloom into the darkness which lay beyond, to discern who might be the individual that was awaiting her; but she could distinguish no one. She advanced—but still proceeding cautiously, for fear lest any unknown treachery should suddenly develop itself from the midst of that darkness. She held the lamp in one hand: the other hand was thrust amidst the folds of her garments, clutching the dagger which she was thus ready to draw forth at any moment. Her form clothed in that light loose drapery, had the air, as it advanced through the semi-obscurity, of a corpse which had burst the cerements of the tomb and had come forth to walk the earth again. So deep was the darkness which prevailed in the long gallery—so comparatively feeble was the light of the small chamber-lamp—that the white figure of the Marchioness would indeed have produced this effect upon Edgar if he had been unprepared for her presence and if he knew not who she was. But from his place of concealment, which was now in the deep shade of the angle made by the projection of the chimney, he beheld her advancing. She came along the gallery, casting her eyes to the right and to the left—stopping every few moments,—looking like Lady Macbeth in her troubled conscience-haunted somnambulism!

At length the Marchioness arrived precisely opposite the place where the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia was suspended; and then as if suddenly recollecting the fact, she stopped short. It was almost with a species of ghastly terror that she gazed up at that portrait; and as her hand trembled, the vibration of the rays flung by the lamp, actually gave to the countenance upon the canvass the appearance of animation. It seemed as if the eyes glanced—the lips moved,—as if the colour were coming and going upon the cheeks—as if the full voluptuous bosom were heaving with respiration. Vague terrors were seizing upon the Marchioness of Mirano—hideous presentiments were gathering fast in around her: but how deadly cold did the blow seem to strike to her heart—how suddenly was the blood congealed in her veins, when a human voice broke upon the solemn and awful silence which had hitherto prevailed, and which the light footfalls of the Marchioness could scarcely be said to have broken.

It was thus the voice spoke:—

"One Lucrezia proves the prototype of the other! Lucrezia Borgia was not more exquisite in beauty nor more diabolical in heart than Lucrezia Mirano! The two Lucrezias shall become equally infamous in the annals of crime! The destiny of one has been long ago fulfilled!

that of the *other* is now in the course of accomplishment!"

At first the lamp almost dropped from the hand of the Marchioness: it was literally slipping from between her fingers, when an instinctive dread of darkness in the awful position wherein she found herself placed, made her clutch it again in the twinkling of an eye, and then retain it with a species of spasmodic tenacity. But Oh! what horror fastened itself upon her mind—what consternation seized upon her brain—what mortal dread retained her ashy lips apart—her eyes fixed and wildly staring—her bosom upheaved—her limbs petrified as if she had in this respect turned into stone! For it was not merely that she heard a human voice—because she had come thither in the expectation of meeting some one: but it was chiefly because the words that were thus breathed forth as it were from the midst of the solemn darkness that prevailed beyond the range of the lamplight, had for her a terrible significance. Yes!—more terrible than the reader can at present comprehend!—for they were not mere threats, or warnings, or prophetic menaces which now for the first time only met her ears; but they seemed to be an echo—almost word for word, syllable for syllable—of language which she herself had one night in her despair breathed on that very spot and while gazing up at that very picture!

And now she beheld a form gradually emerging from the darkness in the midst of which its voice had been speaking;—and it was in consequence of the solemnity assumed by that voice that Lucrezia had failed to recognise it as one which she had heard before. She stepped back a pace or two as she beheld the form; she strained her eyes to ascertain whether it were Paolo: she just beheld enough to convince her that it was not;—and then, utterly unable to endure the horrible torture of suspense any longer, she demanded, "In the name of God, who are you?"

The effort with which she put the query, was the result of a sudden summoning of all her fortitude to her aid under the strong impulse of a feeling bordering on desperation: and now she felt stronger—nay, more, she was gladdened at her own courage, while she was likewise still urged by a sense of the most desperate position. Her fingers tightened upon the handle of her dagger, and she stepped not back another pace as the form was now advancing more closely towards her.

"You ask me who I am," said the voice in response to her adjuration. "Do you not recognise me?—does not your guilty conscience tell you who I am?—I am Edgar Marcellin!"

"Ah? then die!" and as the words were still vibrating through the picture-gallery, the dagger gleamed in the feeble lamplight across the eyes of Edgar Marcellin—deep into his breast the keen blade penetrated—and down he fell, with only a low brief moan issuing from his lips.

A look of fiendish triumph appeared upon the countenance of the Marchioness,—a look which for that brief fleeting space annihilated all her natural beauty as completely as if a mask of red-hot iron had been for a moment applied to her features—so hideous and distorted were they with that look which swept over them! Then she glanced quickly around her—for it was now a con-

dition of horror that assailed her,—not merely horror at the crime itself, but likewise on account of the apprehension that it might by some means be discovered. And then too the idea seized upon the Marchioness that the darkness which prevailed all around the small sphere of light which the little chamber-lamp gave forth, was peopled with spectres—nameless objects, of unknown yet ghastly shapes—gliding noiselessly there, ready to steal forth and wind their arms about her, or confront her with their horrible presence. As these ideas swept through the brain of Lucrezia Mirano, it suddenly struck her that she actually beheld a pair of eyes looking upon her from the midst of the obscurity. For an instant she was on the very point of screaming out: but that cry was hushed upon the brim of her lips, as she perceived that her terror was occasioned by the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia!

"Oh!" murmured the Marchioness, with a strong shudder that passed like an ice-chill over her frame, "that picture haunts me! Accursed be the day when it came into my possession! From that period date all my miseries—all my crimes!"

The Marchioness averted her looks from the portrait: she bent them upon the form of the young Frenchman who lay at her feet—she saw that this form was motionless—and she said within herself, "He is dead! But now how to dispose of the corpse?"

She stood pondering this subject, still holding the lamp in one hand—the dagger in the other. Suddenly she was startled by a noise resembling a footstep: she glanced around—there was another feeble light now burning in the gallery—and the form that bore it was advancing towards her. An awful terror seized upon the Marchioness: but the next moment it lost all its superstitious portion and retained merely its natural ingredient—for she recognised Ciprina!

"Good heavens, dearest Lucrezia!" exclaimed the young lady, not immediately perceiving the form of the young Frenchman upon the floor: "what is the meaning—Ah, my God!" and now Ciprina's eyes caught the first glimpse of that form.

"He is a villain, Ciprina—and he has perished!" said the Marchioness, in a tone that was alike emphatic and sombre.

"Just heaven! is it possible? What! those features? Ah! 'tis Edgar!—yes, 'tis he!"—and Ciprina was at the moment the personification of the most horrified amazement.

"Yes—'tis Edgar Marcellin," replied the Marchioness—"the murderer of Giulio!"

At this instant an extraordinary incident took place,—an occurrence which might well seem to be the result of a preternatural impulse. Edgar Marcellin slowly opened his eyes—raised himself half up to a sitting posture on the floor—and murmuring the words, "Lucrezia—murderess—Giulio!" sank back with a heavy groan, either into the completest unconsciousness or into the embrace of death.

Amazement was depicted upon the countenance of Ciprina: but ghastliest horror was displayed by the features of the Marchioness. A light suddenly seemed to flash in unto the brain of Ciprina: and pointing down to the prostrate form of the young Frenchman, she exclaimed, as she fixed her large

dark eyes upon the Marchioness, "Lucrezia! *he* was innocent!"

"Dare not to say that to me, Ciprina!" cried the Marchioness, her countenance expressing the most diabolic rage and her entire form quivering with the strongest emotion, while her right hand still clutched the dagger as if she were prepared to do murder's work a second time that night.

It was a scene of wild, solemn, and fearful interest. There lay the now inanimate form of the young Frenchman—the bosom of his shirt presenting a deep sanguine stain—his countenance as pale as marble—his beautifully chiselled features completely motionless! There stood the Marchioness, now seeming to be of a fearful beauty—the personification of all the worst passions that are known to the human heart! And there stood Ciprina, in the *deshabille* of a night-toilet—a wrapper thrown around her form, and loosely confined at the waist with a silken cord to the extremities of which tassels were attached. Her long black hair floated over her naked shoulders and down her back; her eyes, which were wont to be languid in their luminousness—full of sensuousness in their lustre—were now shining with a terrible brightness, as their gaze was riveted upon the Marchioness.

"I fear not your dagger, Lucrezia," she said, in a tone which showed that the defiance was no vain boasting: "for at the first indication of a movement of your arm I hurl this lamp violently in your face, and then I send my voice pealing for succour throughout the entire mansion! Better deal with me as a friend! I demand an explanation of everything. If I have misjudged you, heaven knows how rejoiced I shall be to feel that I can conscientiously fall at your feet and demand pardon! But if on the other hand——"

"Ah, I understand you!" said the Marchioness bitterly: "if on the other hand you find that I am guilty of the darkest, blackest crimes, you will betray me!"

"No—by heaven!" exclaimed Ciprina, with a start so sudden that it was evident some idea had forcefully smitten her: "I would shield you, Lucrezia!—I should almost pity you—for I should believe that it was your destiny!"

As Ciprina thus spoke, she held up the lamp which she carried in her hand, so that its light was thrown fully upon the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia; and though her lips spoke not the words, yet did her looks with unmistakable eloquence imply, "There is the prototype of Lucrezia Mirano!"

"Yes, yes—it is, it is my destiny!" cried the wretched Marchioness, now completely overpowered by her feelings. "You have spoken, Ciprina, with only a too terrible correctness—with only a too fearful accuracy—when you have said that it was my destiny! Accursed picture!"—and the Marchioness sent the dagger spinning across the gallery towards the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia; but the weapon merely struck the frame and fell upon the floor.

"Are you mad, Lucrezia?" asked Ciprina: "would you raise the whole mansion by your violence? Oh, by heaven! Edgar lives! Yes, yes—his lips waver!"

"He lives?" said the Marchioness, with a shudder. "No!—impossible!"

"I tell you that he lives," cried Ciprina, "though you wish him dead! But he *shall* live—and it is my care to restore him! Help me, Lucrezia!—help me, I insist upon it! Let us convey him to my chamber——"

"What! resuscitate the serpent that will sting me?" exclaimed the Marchioness, with gestures of mingled rage and horror.

"By heaven, it shall be as I say!" exclaimed Ciprina, darting across the gallery and snatching up the dagger from behind the chair where it had fallen. At the same instant she caught sight of certain objects which were about to arrest her attention still more completely, when recollecting there were other matters of far more importance to be attended to, she returned towards the Marchioness, saying, "I am now the mistress here!—it is for me to command and for you to obey! Do my bidding, and I swear that your crime shall be concealed! Yes—I will pledge my own existence——"

"But if *he* lives?"—and the Marchioness pointed towards Edgar.

"Oh, if he lives," responded Ciprina, "I will stake my existence—I will pledge my very soul, if possible—that he shall in gratitude do my bidding in all things! Lucrezia," she added, in a suddenly altering tone, "I owe you much—I have eaten of your bread—I have found an asylum beneath your roof—you have treated me as a sister—and I swear that I will not needlessly injure you! But I *will* be obeyed at this crisis! See! time is passing—and the traces of this deed have yet to be effaced! Again I say, assist me in bearing Edgar to my chamber—or I must summon other aid, and then everything must be told!"

The Marchioness of Mirano saw that she was now completely in Ciprina's power, and that she must do her bidding. She accordingly made up her mind to leave herself at the mercy and the disposal of her young friend—at least for the present. Edgar Marcellin was giving renewed signs of life: Ciprina quickly assured herself that the blood was no longer flowing from the wound in his breast—it had become stanchied by the saturated and clotted condition of the shirt-front itself. And now the two ladies, raising the young man between them, bore him out of the gallery. So soon as the landing was reached, they deposited the inanimate form on a mat for a moment, that they might rest their arms; and Ciprina, locking the door of the picture-gallery, secured the key about her person, saying, "This is to guard against any one entering thither until the traces of bloodshed shall have been wiped away!"

Again was Edgar Marcellin lifted between the two ladies; and they bore him to Ciprina's chamber. There Ciprina at once examined his wound: she knew not whether it were mortal—but hope was in her heart, inasmuch as the blood had ceased to flow. For a moment the idea of procuring by some means or another the assistance of a medical man struck the young lady: but she quickly abandoned the project—for she said within herself, "If the wound be mortal, no surgeon can save him; and if it be curable, all the attentions that I can bestow shall far transcend whatever ministrations a surgeon might afford!"

"Tell me, Ciprina," said the Marchioness, after the young lady had bestowed such immediate at-

tentions as she deemed requisite, while Edgar was again displaying signs of resuscitation,—“tell me Ciprina, what made you come to me in the gallery at that moment?”

“Oh, the explanation is brief and easily given!” replied the young lady. “I beheld in the incident of the purse something more than you thought fit to avow:—your hand, as I placed that purse in it, was as cold as death. I was uneasy on your account. When the guests had departed, you volunteered no explanations. My uneasiness increased—until at length it became intolerable. I resolved to seek you in your apartments, and implore that in the name of friendship you would entrust me with your secret if anything unpleasant had occurred. You were not in your rooms—I knew not what to think—your maids had evidently been dismissed for the night—and you were not there! I was affrighted—I was full of perplexity—when I beheld a billet upon the carpet—”

“Ah!” ejaculated the Marchioness: “that note—”

“Yes—it is here!” and Ciprina handed the billet. “Now you comprehend how it was that I found my way to the picture-gallery. But you, Lucrezia,—Oh! you must have explanations to give me? One part of the revelations you have thus to make, seems to be fathomable by means of conjecture. Yes—methinks I can read that mystery! Tell me, Lucrezia—tell me—did not Edgar Marcellin come to accuse you of the deed with which you had charged him?”

“Oh, Ciprina! I shudder,” said the Marchioness, with vehemence and bitterness,—“I shudder to the utmost confines of my being when you address me by my name—when you call me Lucrezia! Fatal name! horrible association with an inevitable destiny! Good heavens, Ciprina! is it possible that I have become all which I so dreaded to be? Tell me, is it a dream? or was Lucrezia Borgia verily the prototype in mind as well as in form of Lucrezia Mirano?”

The Marchioness was now terribly excited: her bosom of snowy whiteness was heaving tumultuously—there was a wild sinister light in her blue eyes—and with her exquisitely modelled hand she nervously tossed back the tresses of light golden auburn which etrayed over her naked shoulders and that bosom which was swelling like the billows of the ocean.

“For heaven’s sake, tranquillize yourself!” said Ciprina, “or the household will become alarmed! I will ask you no more questions now—indeed I will never more trouble you with any if you will only do my bidding and follow the friendly counsel which I shall give you! See, Lucrezia! you will not at least have the crime of his death upon your conscience!”—and she pointed to Marcellin. “He lives!—he *will* live! Oh, yee! the hope is strong in my mind!”

“And you answer for him, Ciprina?” said the Marchioness, in a deep hollow voice; “you pledge yourself for my safety? You promise that he shall not stand forth as my accuser?”

“Oh, yee—I promise!” cried Ciprina. “But now, I beseech you, retire to your chamber—”

“And the blood—the blood, Ciprina, in the gallery?” said the Marchioness, still speaking in a voice so changed from its natural intonation that no one who heard it without seeing the speaker

could possibly believe that it was actually the voice of Lucrezia Mirano.

“Leave everything to me,” answered Ciprina.

“Come, Lucrezia!”

“Oh, that name! that horrible name!” ejaculated the Marchioness, with a shudder. “And that portrait!” she continued, her countenance now as white as a sheet and her eyes glaring with wild horror: “never, Ciprina, can I again look upon that picture! No—it would drive me mad! There seems to be a horrible fatality in the fact that it ever came into my possession! It must be destroyed—or sent away—”

“Leave this likewise to me,” interrupted Ciprina: “it shall be removed from the gallery tomorrow morning. To this I pledge myself! But even that proceeding must be conducted with discretion—the least circumstance may now engender sinister ideas and suspicions—”

“Act as you think fit, Ciprina,” said the Marchioness; “but I conjure you, in mercy, let not that portrait remain any longer where it can meet my eyes!”

“I have already given you that pledge,” answered Ciprina. “And now hasten to your own chamber, and leave me to manage everything.”

The Marchioness threw her arms about Ciprina’s neck, sobbing and weeping bitterly. She endeavoured to speak—but she could not: the power of utterance was choked by her emotions. Hastily wiping away her tears, she snatched up a lamp, flung upon Ciprina a look which seemed to be one of ineffable gratitude, and then rushed from the room.

So soon as Ciprina found herself alone with the young Frenchman, she bent over him—she pressed her lips to his—she smoothed away the dark clustering hair from his brow—and she bathed his forehead. He slowly opened his eyes: joy thrilled through Ciprina’s heart—she looked into their depths to see whether they would recognise her—but alas! it became only too painfully evident that it was on vacancy he gazed. Then his eyes closed again, and a sigh issued slowly and heavily forth from Ciprina’s lips.

She then prepared to leave her chamber for a few minutes. She first of all examined Edgar’s wound again; and it was with the supremest satisfaction she found that the blood remained fully stanchied. She smoothed the pillow on which his head reposed: then she listened to judge by his breathing whether he suffered pain—and she found that his respiration was regular and apparently facile. Then she took a sponge and some strong essence; and she issued forth from the chamber; but she locked the door behind her—and as she secured the key about her person, she murmured to herself, “With all her display of emotion, that fiend in human shape might take it into her head to steel back hither and complete her hideous work!”

Ciprina retraced her way towards the picture-gallery. All continued profoundly silent throughout the mansion; and the numerous domestics who were cradled in the arms of slumber, little suspected what scenes were taking place within those walls. On entering the picture-gallery, Ciprina’s first care was to sponge away the traces of blood; and this was speedily accomplished by means of the powerful essence which the

young lady had brought with her. Besides, the wound had poured forth but little blood upon the floor, for the greater portion of the sanguine tide had been absorbed by the cambric forming the bosom of the shirt. And now Ciprina proceeded towards the screen, which, as the reader will remember, had in the first instance served as Edgar's hiding-place in the picture-gallery; and behind a chair in the neighbourhood of that screen Ciprina picked up a pistol and a bundle of raiment. These were the objects which her eye had encountered when she possessed herself of the dagger, and on which she was unable at the time to bestow aught more than a passing notice. Taking the pistol and the bundle with her, Ciprina returned to her own chamber, where she found the patient still plunged in a deep lethargic slumber.

She proceeded to unroll the packet of garments which she had brought with her from the picture-gallery: and she perceived that it was a complete male costume. While she was contemplating it—wondering whether it could belong to Edgar Marcellin, and if so, why he should have brought it thither—the idea gradually stole into her mind that the suit was too small for him. She searched in the pockets—but she found nothing? To whom could the garments belong? and why should they have been deposited in the picture-gallery? These were the questions which Ciprina asked herself, but to which she could not find an answer by any means of conjecture. She now regretted that she should not have made a more complete search in the picture-gallery: for who could tell but that there might be other articles mysteriously concealed there?—and everything to Ciprina's mind was now fraught with more or less significance in reference to the transactions which were developing themselves. She returned to the gallery, taking good care, as before, to lock the door of her chamber, for fear lest the Marchioness might take it into her head to penetrate thither.

On entering the picture-gallery, Ciprina looked everywhere about; and presently she discovered Edgar's hat and cloak, which were concealed behind the screen. Perceiving naught else to attract her attention, she took the hat and cloak to her chamber; and then she proceeded to examine once more the wound which Edgar Marcellin had received. The blood had been effectually stanch; and Ciprina was hugging the hope that everything would go well, when an idea suddenly struck her. Might not some medicine be absolutely necessary?—some stimulant, perhaps, to enable the sleeper to cast off his lethargy? or some sedative in case feverish symptoms should develop themselves? Or again, might not the wound itself require the application of some healing balsam? These questions naturally suggested themselves the moment Ciprina had some little leisure for reflection; and they excited grave considerations in her mind. A human life was at stake; and delicate as well as unwearied though her attentions might be, yet would they prove sufficient to rescue the patient from the jaws of death? Was it not a case in which at least some reference must be had to the medical art? Yes—Ciprina speedily came to the conviction that it was so! Fever might supervene—inflammation might arise—gangrene and mortification ensue,—

and all perhaps for want of some potion or unguent which a skill superior to her own must supply.

But what was to be done? She could not summon the regular medical attendant of the mansion; for this would be to create at once the necessity of giving an account of how the patient received his wound. To have recourse to any stranger surgeon, would be attended with the same inconvenience. Yet something *must* be done! The longer she reflected upon it, the more did Ciprina mistrust the efficacy of her own simple ministrations; and she thought within herself that it would be little less than murder to allow a fellow-creature to perish for want of the aid which medical science could now alone supply.

While she was revolving all these matters in her mind, she bethought herself of a certain woman of whom she had more than once heard mention made, and who was reputed to exercise the professions of fortune-teller, female-physician, *accoucheuse* or midwife, compounder of love-charms and philters, vender of amulets, and so forth. She was known as La Dolcina. She was extensively patronised by persons of all classes and by both sexes, though her clients were chiefly females. Doubtless she had powerful protectors—or else she would not have been permitted to carry on her multifarious avocations without receiving the slightest molestation from Count Ramorino and his police-myrmidons. In many Continental cities characters of this description may be found,—some smattering of surgical knowledge serving as the groundwork for the varied nature of their profession, mixed with a great deal of imposture, and with other necessary ingredients, such as shrewdness, hardihood, cleverness, and audacity. One of these characters was La Dolcina; and it was the name of this woman which now crossed the recollection of Ciprina in her emergency.

La Dolcina lived in an adjacent street. Ciprina calculated that she need not be altogether more than half-an-hour absent, provided that her summons at the wise-woman's house should be speedily answered and her requirement promptly attended to. Half-an-hour!—could she leave Edgar Marcellin for this period? What if the wound should open in her absence? he might bleed to death! But on the other hand, for want of a balsam or a potion his death might be even still more certain! Ciprina therefore resolved to leave him at all risks, and seek the abode of La Dolcina.

The mansion of the Marchioness di Mirano was in its arrangements well adapted for the gallantries and intrigues carried on by its mistress; and from the very first moment that Ciprina set foot within its walls, she was rendered acquainted with those local facilities in order that she might avail herself of them at her pleasure. Thus she had no sooner made up her mind to the course which we have named, than she saw likewise how to carry her design into execution. She enveloped herself in an ample cloak: she made every possible arrangement on behalf of Edgar Marcellin during her absence; and on issuing forth from her chamber, she locked the door, taking good care to secure the key about her person. She descended the private staircase; and by means of a pass-key she opened the door leading into the grounds. It

was now three o'clock in the morning; but being in that declining season of the year—the end of October—it was still dark. No moon nor stars shone upon the canopy of heaven; and at that hour there was a chilliness which made Ciprina shudder, even beneath the thick and ample covering of the cloak. She hastily skirted one of the sides of the house; and she reached a small door, or rather gate, set in one of the boundary walls. This one likewise opened by means of the pass-key; and she emerged into one of the streets in the neighbourhood of the Mirano mansion.

CHAPTER V.

LA DOLFINA.

CIPRINA pursued her way at a rapid rate: she passed into another street, and quickly reached the house in which she knew that La Dolfina dwelt. This house was a small one, and was situated between two habitations of much larger dimensions as well as of an infinitely superior appearance. As Ciprina glanced up at the particular abode which she sought, she was rejoiced to behold a light glimmering through the window on the second floor; for she thought to herself that there might possibly be some one up in the house, and that it would not therefore be difficult to obtain the desired interview with La Dolfina.

The young lady lost not a moment in pulling the iron chain which hung at the door-post, and which communicated with a bell inside. No sound of that bell reached her ear: it evidently was not immediately within any passage or vestibule into which the front door might open; and therefore the thought flashed to Ciprina's mind that it must probably rang in the room of La Dolfina herself. Not many moments was she kept waiting; for the door was opened by an elderly female who had evidently just risen from her couch for the purpose—for she had only flung on some loose upper garment, and had thrust her naked scraggy feet into slippers. She was about fifty years of age, short and insignificant in stature—shrivelled and dried up, with a mummy-like aspect, and with grizzly locks forming a sort of fringe to a gaudy parti-coloured silk kerchief which was bound about her head. So thin she was that the front of her dress being open, every bone on her scraggy breast could be counted, and the skin upon those bones looked like shrivelling parchment. Her profile was largely and conspicuously squiline: indeed she had a nose which projected far beyond the dimensions consistent with such a face; so that it seemed as if the beak of an immense eagle had been stuck on to the middle of that countenance. Her chin was proportionately prominent; but there was no particular sinking of the mouth—for she had a perfect set of teeth, and these, which were singularly well preserved for a person of her age, gleamed in an almost ghastly whiteness in contrast with the swarthiness of her complexion and by the light of the candle which she carried in her hand. Her eyes were not particularly large; but they were keenly piercing and of extraordinary lustre. It seemed as if she were intent upon fathoming the pur-

poses of Ciprina's soul the very instant the young lady crossed the threshold and threw back the hood of her mantle sufficiently to reveal her own countenance.

Yes—that woman was La Dolfina, as Ciprina at once knew, for she had heard some descriptive details concerning her. No sooner was the door opened than the young lady stepped across the threshold, as we have already hinted; and La Dolfina, having bent upon her that glances of keenness for a few moments, led the way up a narrow staircase, the steps of which were neither carpeted nor polished, and the balustrade, by its massiveness as well as by its worm-eaten appearance, displayed its antiquity. La Dolfina halted on reaching the first-floor; and opening a door, she made a sign for Ciprina to proceed in advance. By the manner in which La Dolfina held the candle, it threw scarcely any light into the interior of that room—only just a sufficient gleaming to afford a glimpse of some object the dim outline of which appeared to Ciprina's vision to take a skeleton-shape. It was now for the first time that a sense of terror smote the young lady who had hitherto shown so much presence of mind throughout all the circumstances of this memorable night; and she hesitated to cross the threshold of that apartment in the obscure depths of which unknown horrors appeared to be lurking.

"Proceed, signora," said La Dolfina, now breaking the silence which she had hitherto maintained—and there was something alike solemn and commanding, grave and imperious, in the tone of her voice. "Do you tremble? are you afraid? If so, wherefore did you seek me? Doubtless you came to demand my succour in some strait or difficulty; else why this visit at such an hour?"

"I know that it is unseasonable," responded Ciprina; "and I ought to have commenced by offering my excuses——"

"Not so, signora," rejoined La Dolfina: "for no hour is held unseasonable by me. By day I am always at my post: by night the taper constantly burns in my chamber"—and she pointed upwards to the room overhead,—"where likewise hangs that mouth with the iron tongue which speaks when the chain at the door is touched."

Ciprina comprehended that by means of this last circumlocutory phraseology the wise-woman was alluding to the bell; and she could scarcely suppress a smile at the evident empirical savour which the language bore. The effect was salutary upon her nerves: her courage immediately revived—and fearlessly she now crossed the threshold of the apartment. But scarcely had her feet entered that room, when she suddenly stopped short, appalled and dismayed—while a shriek rose to the very brim of her lips; but by a strong effort she kept it back. But no wonder that she should have been smitten with terror! aye, and horror and consternation likewise;—for right before her, at the extremity of the apartment appeared a ghastly skeleton,—the hideous atomy appearing actually to be advancing towards her in proportion as La Dolfina suffered the beams of the candle to penetrate farther and farther into that room.

Ciprina quickly recovered her presence of mind; for she now felt well assured that the presence of

the skeleton in that room was only one of the vulgar artifices by which La Dolcina sought to overawe those who came to consult her, that she might exercise all the greater amount of influence upon their feelings and thereby obtain proportionate hold upon their purses. As Ciprina entered farther into the room, the woman following with the light,—she perceived that it was fitted up to some extent like a laboratory, and that it had the usual decorations—if they may be so termed—which are to be seen in pictures representing the studios of alchemists, astrologers, and conjurors of past times. There was a crocodile suspended to the ceiling: in addition to the skeleton, there were several relics of humanity scattered about, such as skulls, and bones belonging to the arms or legs; while an array of glass bottles upon a shelf contained some specimens of infant-monsters. The apartment was in other respects tolerably well furnished: at one extremity there was a table covered with a black cloth, on which lay a pack of cards, writing materials, some mathematical instruments, and three or four bulky volumes fastened with brazen clasps: the arm-chair behind this table was likewise covered with black cloth; and Ciprina had no difficulty in comprehending that this was the seat which the wise-woman occupied when consulted by her clients.

But as the matter which had brought Ciprina thither was pressing, and she was in haste to accomplish her purpose and take her departure, she said to La Dolcina, "Perhaps there are certain forms and ceremonies which usually have to be fulfilled by those who come to consult you? I pray you that on the present occasion all these may be dispensed with,—I mean, however, with the exception of that one which is an indispensable preliminary to a better understanding between us."

Thus speaking, Ciprina placed five or six pieces of gold upon the table; and she saw that La Dolcina's eyes glistened at the liberality of the fee thus offered.

"You do indeed adopt, signora," said the woman, "a course which is at once calculated to win my confidence and ensure my services. What can I do for you?"

"A young gentleman, in whom I am deeply interested," answered Ciprina, "has received a very severe wound—"

"From what weapon?" demanded La Dolcina.

"From a dagger," answered the young lady.

"You do not require any particular details relative to the origin of the quarrel in which the young gentleman sustained the injury: it is sufficient for you to know that it suits me to throw the veil of secrecy over an incident the exposure of which would cause scandal and inconvenience—"

"Enough, signora!" interrupted the woman.

"Tell me, do you wish me to accompany you to see your patient, or to give you some medicament according to my own judgment?"

"I prefer that the latter course should be adopted," answered Ciprina; and she then gave the woman a few descriptive details in reference to the aspect and situation of Edgar's wound, the limited extent to which it had bled externally, and the lethargic state in which she had left him.

"If the wound had been a mortal one," said

La Dolcina, who had listened with the utmost attention, "the young gentleman would have by this time breathed his last. There is consequently every hope. I will give you a medicine which must be administered, and a balsam to be applied to the wound. Be seated, signora: in five minutes the preparations will be complete."

The woman lighted a lamp which stood upon the table; and taking the candle, she passed into an adjacent room, closing the door behind her. Ciprina did not sit down: she was too nervous and anxious to allow herself to rest. Not that she any longer paid the slightest regard to the ghastly objects by which she was surrounded; but it was on Edgar Marcellin's account that she was thus uneasy. He might perish during her absence:—or he might recover his senses, and in the impossibility of conjecturing why he was left alone, he might pull the bell until he alarmed the household. But La Dolcina did not keep Ciprina a moment longer than she had requested her to wait; for in five minutes she reappeared from the adjacent room, with a phial and a small box in her hand.

"Here is the potion—and here is the balsam," she said. "So far as I am enabled to judge from what you have told me, signora, I entertain the hope that these medicaments will prove perfectly effective. But if it be necessary for you to come and consult me again, remember that I am at your service at any moment either by day or by night. If you should wish me to visit your patient, I will do so under circumstances of the strictest secrecy. In short, signora, you may command me in all things.—And now one word more!"

"Hasten, I beseech you!" exclaimed Ciprina; "for you may well conceive that I am full of anxiety and suspense."

"Ah, lady," said La Dolcina, assuming a compassionate air, but in reality surveying Ciprina's countenance with an intense curiosity, as if there seeking to read more of the history of the business that had brought her thither; "it is a pity that one so young as you should already be acquainted with the troubles which too often attend upon affairs of gallantry and love—"

"What mean you?" demanded Ciprina quickly.

"You have some ulterior purpose—you are desirous to introduce something to which the words you have just spoken are a preface? Explain yourself—but be quick, I beseech you!"

"I was thinking, signora," answered La Dolcina, "that one who is probably entering upon the troubled sea of that existence which is led by so many ladies of beauty and wealth in this city—I mean an existence of joyousness and pleasure, of gallantry and intrigue—Pardon me, signora—I intend no offence—"

"Proceed," said Ciprina impatiently.

"A young lady thus situated," continued La Dolcina, speaking more confidently as she became convinced that her random arrows had not hit very wide of the mark,—“a young lady thus situated should be prepared for every emergency. Beauty occasions envy: it wins hearts, and then produces jealousy. In short, signora, attractions such as those which you possess may become a source of peril and danger to yourself, as well as to the fortunate ones on whom you may bestow



your smiles. And enmity such as this works insidiously, signora: jealousy and envy veil murderous thoughts beneath smiling countenances: revenge glides noiselessly and secretly like a serpent amidst the flowers that border the walks which your steps pursue. The wine which sparkles the brightest, may contain poison of a nature the deadliest!"

"Why do you tell me all these things?" demanded Ciprina, wondering whether the woman had any particular motive for such discourse—or whether she were merely adopting a usual jargon in the hope of drawing forth something more from the purse of her new client.

"Why do I tell you these things?" said La Dolcina, assuming a mysterious air of confidence, as well as speaking with a certain decisiveness, as if she knew that she was perfectly justified in the course that she was taking. "You best can tell, signora, whether there be anything in my words

which may have caused a serious reflection to arise in your own mind! You best can tell whether your beauty has as yet made you enemies amongst your own sex, or led to disputes between rival aspirants of the opposite sex! You best know whether it were prudent for you to take all possible precautions, or whether it were wise to leave everything to accident and chance!"

The woman's words had indeed touched a chord that vibrated in Ciprina's heart. Might she not from recent circumstances incur some danger at the hands of the Marchioness of Mirano?—had she not discovered that Lucrezia was indeed as completely a prey to all the darkest passions of the human soul, as was her prototype, Lucrezia Borgia? Was there not consequently something terrible in the idea of living beneath the same roof with such a character,—exposed at any instant to the effects of her malignity or her fears, her jealousy or her vindictiveness?

"And if I deemed it more prudent," said Ciprina, after a few moments' reflection, "to adopt whatsoever precautions should be taken by a young lady dwelling in this city whereof you seem not to entertain too good an opinion,—what course would you advise? what plan would you recommend?—in short, what can you do for me?"

"I do not aim at impossibilities," answered La Dolfina: "I do not pretend to possess the power of rendering you invulnerable to the dagger's point. You have an eye to watch lest the blow should be levelled against you; and you have an arm to ward it off. But if it be by means of a subtle poison that any enemy of your's should seek to work——"

"What in this case can you do?" asked Ciprina. "Tell me, quickly, I beseech you!—for I am in haste to take my departure!"

"To me have descended the traditions of many secrets," responded La Dolfina; "but it may be sufficient to observe that if the receipts for compounding every subtle poison be within my possession, the knowledge of the antidote for each and all is mine likewise. Do not deem that I am giving way to idle vaunts, or that I am naught more than one of the herd of vulgar empirics seeking to dispose of their nostrums by every possible means, fair or false——"

"No, no," interjected Ciprina: "I have not this evil opinion of you! Report says that you set a value upon the fame which you have acquired and the large amount of patronage which your wisdom in your dealings has brought you: I have moreover heard it whispered that you never undertake that which you cannot perform;—and, to be brief, if I had not experienced the utmost confidence in your skill and your integrity, I should not have been here at this moment. Now speak frankly, but quickly and briefly, I conjure you!"

"Behold, signora!" exclaimed La Dolfina, producing another phial, which she had hitherto kept concealed amongst her garments. "This is an antidote to every poison with which treachery and revenge, spite or jealousy, envy or malice, are accustomed to work in this city. Two drops taken daily in any of your usual beverages, will render your life a charmed one against the attack of any poison which may be insidiously administered. But understand me well! It is an antidote only against poisons that pass the portals of the lips: it would prove ineffective against poison infused into the blood. Thus, for instance, if you be bitten by the venomous tooth of a serpent—or if you be wounded by a poisoned weapon—you must not look to the contents of this phial as a means of cure. But if on the other hand you drink the deadliest poison which the products of nature can yield or which human ingenuity can eliminate, its effects would be utterly counteracted by that fluid."

Ciprina placed some more pieces of gold upon the table; and she said, "I am now about to take my departure. I do not ask you whether you know me, or whether I am altogether a stranger to you: but I believe that La Dolfina is accustomed to maintain the profoundest secrecy in reference to the objects of all who visit her——"

"And not only the objects, signora," responded the wise-woman; "but likewise in respect to names and persons."

La Dolfina lighted the young lady down the staircase, and opened the front door to afford her egress. Ciprina calculated that she had been three-quarters of an hour absent from the Mirano mansion; and she hastened through the streets with a speed that was accelerated by the poignancy of uneasiness and suspense on behalf of her patient. Unobserved by any one, either without or within the building, she effected an entry; and on reaching her chamber she found that Edgar Marcellin was sleeping in precisely the same position in which she had left him. How her heart beat as she first crossed the threshold and beheld him lying motionless on the couch!—and what a cold shuddering passed over her at the dread idea that his spirit might have fled during her absence! And then how infinite was her relief when on gliding towards him, she perceived that his lips moved and that the sound of a regular respiration came therefrom. She lost no time in pouring the potion down his throat; and then she applied some of the balsam to the wound. Having done this she sat down by his side to keep watch over her patient; for she experienced not the slightest inclination to retire to rest.

Ciprina had several handmaidens specially attached to her own service; but of these there was only one whom she was accustomed to treat with the fullest confidence,—the one, in short, who was admitted into the secret of her amours, and who stood in the same light towards herself as Lisetta had been wont to do towards the Marchioness. The young female who had thus become Ciprina's *confidante*, was named Antonia: she was much attached to her mistress; and her trustworthiness was beyond all question. Antonia was therefore now to be the only depositress of the secret that Edgar Marcellin, in a wounded state, was an inmate of Ciprina's chamber. It was perfectly easy for this secret to be kept from the knowledge of the other handmaidens, inasmuch as the amours alike of the Marchioness and Ciprina often led to the issue of particular orders for which no explanation was volunteered; and thus, if Ciprina chose to intimate that she should require the services of Antonia *only* for the next few days, the mandate would be complied with—it would not have a strange appearance—and indeed would excite little curiosity. Thus, to Antonia was the secret of Edgar Marcellin's presence in Ciprina's chamber revealed; and a command to the effect at which we have above hinted was issued to the other handmaidens attached to Ciprina's service.

We have already seen that the language used by La Dolfina towards Ciprina, had produced no mean impression upon the young lady.

"Lucrezia," she thought within herself, thus alluding to the Marchioness, "may perhaps now hate me as much as she has ever liked me; because the terrific secrets of her crimes have come to my knowledge. She must dread likewise lest Edgar, regardless of my influence, should persist in the exposure of her iniquity so soon as he shall be restored to health. Yes!—for a thousand reasons she must wish that the blow had proved fatal and that he should have ceased to exist! May there not have been something terribly prophetic in La Dolfina's words—though she herself spoke them at mere random—as indeed she *must* have done, and was therefore ignorant of the impor-

tance which might be attached to those words themselves. In short, may not both Edgar and myself run the utmost risks while beneath this roof?—may not the Marchioness seek our deaths, so that she may by one blow as it were remove from her path those only whom she may have at all to dread? Yes—and therefore perhaps the possession of this antidote is after all no mean advantage; and the artifice of La Delfina to sell her drug, may prove of more service to me than she could well have foreseen at the time! But still it is not of poison *only* that I must beware! Lucrezia can wield the dagger:—she has shown that she can do so! I must not always trust to vigilance and wakefulness—no, nor even to the security of locks and bolts; for treachery, so subtle and insidious as here, can overcome all such difficulties and set all such barriers at defiance. Nor dare I think of removing my patient elsewhere! Here he must remain for the present: it were death to disturb him in his present state! But, Oh! how can I surround him with additional defences beyond my own vigilance—my own wakefulness? What can I do to inspire terror in the soul of Lucrezia—or to overawe her? Ah! that portrait, of which she now stands so much in dread! Yes—the idea is good; and her fears shall in this respect serve my purpose!”

It was while seated by the couch whereon Edgar Marcellin reposed, and between eight and nine o'clock in the morning, that Ciprina made these reflections. To Antonia the secret of Edgar's presence had already been revealed, accompanied by an intimation similar to that which had been given to La Delfina,—to the effect that the wound was received in a quarrel with some other person. Antonia was discreet and asked no questions; nor did she even betray by her countenance that she wondered how the French gentleman had come thither: though her curiosity was naturally excited to learn whatsoever details there might be in the background in respect to the mysterious occurrence.

“Antonio, come with me,” said Ciprina, a few minutes after the idea had struck her in reference to the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia. “There is something I am about to do—a whim to gratify—and in which you can assist me.”

Ciprina and the handmaiden issued forth from the suite of apartments,—the young lady again taking care to lock the door, so that the Marchioness should have no opportunity, so far as human foresight could avail, of penetrating thither in the meantime. Straight to the picture-gallery did Ciprina lead the way; and assisted by Antonia, she took down the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia. By the transposition of some other picture from a place whence it could be well spared, the vacancy caused by the removal of the portrait was filled up; and thus no gap would strike the eye of any one entering into that gallery. The portrait itself was borne to Ciprina's own suite of apartments; and there it was suspended to the wall of one of the rooms,—Antonia assisting her mistress in the task, and wondering what species of whim could possibly be receiving its gratification in such a proceeding as this.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WOUNDED MAN.

HOURS passed away—and Ciprina continued to watch by the couch on which Edgar Marcellin reposed. He slept serenely: two or three times he had opened his eyes since the potion was administered; he seemed to have a glimmering recollection of Ciprina—for he looked up at her countenance with a species of vacant surprise: then he gazed slowly around the room—but failing to recognise it, he turned his regards again upon the young lady, and then sank off into a renewed slumber. This, as we have said, happened three or four times in the course of several hours: but on each occasion Ciprina noticed that the eyes of the young Frenchman were brighter and clearer and that his looks dwelt for a longer period upon her countenance.

In the meanwhile she had not seen the Marchioness. She chose not to quit her own suite of apartments: she resolved to bestow all her attention and care upon Edgar Marcellin, and she was afraid to quit the side of his couch even for a minute. She was nevertheless exceedingly anxious, as the reader may suppose, to learn whatsoever explanations there might be to give in reference to the whole train of circumstances connected with Giulio's murder, which were only now for the first time beginning to develop themselves to Ciprina's knowledge. Whether the Marchioness would give her these explanations or not, she could not tell: but even if she were confident that Lucrezia di Mirano would reveal everything, she nevertheless would not abandon the side of her patient's couch and seek the apartments of the Marchioness to receive those explanations.

“Has her ladyship left her own rooms yet?” inquired Ciprina of Antonia, between two and three o'clock in the afternoon.

“No, signora,” answered the handmaiden: “her ladyship is somewhat indisposed, I believe, after the fatigues of last night's entertainment. Her ladyship has not therefore quitted her boudoir—as I just now learnt from Teresa whom I met upon the stairs.”

“At all events,” thought Ciprina to herself, “I am glad Lucrezia does *not* come hither to seek me! And yet it was hardly to be expected that she would—unless indeed she were inspired by some malignant or treacherous intent: for now I believe that woman to be capable of every iniquity—and heavens! how my opinion of her is changed within the last few hours!”

As these reflections passed through Ciprina's mind, she perceived that Edgar Marcellin was turning upon the couch, and that his eyelids were wavering as if about to be opened. She now at once dismissed Antonia from the room on some pretext—for she did not wish the girl to be present at a moment when Edgar Marcellin might perhaps recover the faculty of speech and begin alluding to the occurrences which had prestrated him there. And now again did Edgar gaze up with an air of surprise into Ciprina's countenance. That he recognised her was almost a certainty: but that his ideas were still too much confused to

allow him to form a conjecture as to the cause of his being there, with the young lady bending over him, was likewise perceived by herself. She hastened to place a refreshing beverage to his lips: he drank copiously; and his eyes gradually assumed a still more intelligent expression as they were fixed upon her countenance.

"Do you know me, Edgar?" she said in a gentle voice. "Yes—I see that you do! I am Ciprina—and you are safe here—no harm can befall you!"

"But where am I?" he asked, in a very feeble voice. "Tell me—is it possible that—"

"I know what you mean, Edgar," Ciprina hastened to respond, as she saw that he stopped and gasped for breath. "You wish to know whether you are within the walls of the Mirano mansion?"

"Yes—that is what I wish to know," he said, still speaking murmuringly and faintly.

"I must not deceive you—but you on your side must not excite yourself," answered Ciprina. "You are beneath the roof of the Mirano mansion—but you are in my suite of rooms—you are under my care—I have constituted myself your nurse—I have obtained medicaments for you from a skilful source—and I vow that no harm shall befall you! Oh, no! I will guard and protect you with all requisite vigilance!"

"I believe you, Ciprina," replied Edgar; "and I put my trust in you. I feel that I am helpless and powerless—I remember that the vile woman—but perhaps I may give offence by speaking to you thus?"

"What! of a murderer?" said Ciprina, with a most grave expression of countenance. "Alas, alas! I know that she whom I was wont to love as a sister, has done deeds which make the blood stagnate with horror—freeze it in my very veins—"

"Yes, deeds of horror!" murmured Edgar. "But tell me—how long have I been here?"

"Some twelve hours," answered Ciprina. "It was between two and three in the morning when that wound was inflicted: it is now three in the afternoon."

"Ah! heaven be thanked," murmured Edgar, "that a longer period has not elapsed! When the mind is suddenly plunged into darkness, and when it wakes up again, there is the appalling dread that a long interval may have passed, though it seems to be but a moment of time which has gone by."

"Do not excite yourself by speech," said Ciprina. "You must remain quiet."

"No—it is impossible!" answered Edgar Marcellin. "Oh, Ciprina! do you know—"

"Now, for heaven's sake, be calm! be tranquil!" interrupted the young lady, placing her hand upon Edgar's lips. "I can guess what you mean! You have a sense of deep wrongs—you have been most unjustly accused—"

"Ah! then you know it—and you acknowledge that it is so!" ejaculated Marcellin; and his voice was becoming stronger—at least so it appeared; though Ciprina dreaded lest dangerous reaction should presently ensue from this excitement. "You are aware that—"

"I know much—I suspect a great deal more," said Ciprina. "But really, really, Edgar, if you

value your own safety—Ah! do not excite yourself! I mean not your personal safety in respect to the law, for she would not dare accuse you publicly and openly!—I mean therefore the safety of your life—your restoration to health—"

"You are very kind to me, Ciprina," interrupted Marcellin; "and if I do recover," he continued, as he thought of Corinna, who was far away in another land,— "if I do recover, Ciprina, I shall never be enabled to testify my gratitude—"

"Speak not thus, Edgar! I am not selfish in what I am doing for you," said Ciprina. "Oh, do not suppose that I am utterly depraved, and that I am unconscious of the duties which fellow-creatures owe to one another! And now be silent—compose yourself to sleep again—"

"It is impossible, Ciprina," interrupted Marcellin, with perfect vehemence. "There seems to be frenzy in my brain—a fire burning in my heart—"

"Oh, he will kill himself! he will kill himself by giving way to this excitement!" exclaimed Ciprina, wringing her hands. "For heaven's sake, be calm!"

"I ought not thus to distress and afflict you, my kind good nurse," said Marcellin; "but you must make allowances for all that is agitating in my brain. Am I not beneath the same roof with a murderer?—has she not endeavoured to take my life?—may she not still harbour assassin intentions—"

"Believe me, Edgar, you are safe! I pledge my existence that you are safe!" said Ciprina vehemently.

"With that assurance I must so far be satisfied," rejoined Edgar. "But you tell me it is growing late in the afternoon—and good heavens! Paoli will wonder what has become of me!"

"Paoli?" said Ciprina, struck by the name; for she remembered it to be that which Giulio bore. "Paoli did you say? A relation—"

"The father of the murdered youth," responded Edgar. "Oh! what must he think? And perhaps by this time he has left Florence. Yes!—for the mandate of the police was peremptory—"

"Is there anything I can do," inquired Ciprina, "to tranquillize your mind on this point? I should not like to leave you even for a few minutes: but I have a trusty messenger—"

"Yes—let me send the message! it is absolutely necessary!" said Edgar Marcellin. "I must let Signor Paoli know what has happened to me and wherefore I have failed to keep the appointment which I gave him—"

"But if you let him know what has happened," interjected Ciprina, "he will appeal to the police—he will create an exposure—"

"Ah! do not tell me that you are going to plead on behalf of that demoness in female shape!" ejaculated Edgar: "or else—"

"Or else you will think I am as vile and wicked as herself?" said Ciprina, with a tone and look that were full of reproach. "This is not kind of you, Edgar! I may have my failings!—and I know that I have—yes, and grave ones too—But Oh! no one can loathe more utterly than I the abhorrent crimes—"

"Forgive me, Ciprina," said Marcellin, with a

most mournful look: "I am not displaying a grateful heart towards one to whom, as I may judge by circumstances, I doubtless owe my life! I meant not to accuse you, Ciprina——"

"Enough, Edgar!" interrupted the young lady. "You may suppose that there are perhaps reasons——But let us not now discuss the course which you are to pursue when restored to health! I will send a message to Signor Paoli, to the effect that you have sustained an injury, but that you will communicate with him shortly. Will this suffice?"

"Yes—it must—it must—under existing circumstances!" answered Edgar. "But I beseech you, delay not."

"This moment the messenger shall depart," said Ciprina: and she hastened to ring the bell.

Antonia answered the summons; and she was instructed to proceed without delay to a particular destination, to inquire for a certain Signor Paoli, and to deliver a message in the sense already sketched out by Ciprina. Away went Antonia accordingly; and during the half-hour that her absence lasted, Ciprina insisted that her patient should abstain from conversation; and she likes wise persuaded him to partake of some nutritious broth which she had ordered to be prepared. Antonia came back with the announcement that Signor Paoli had been arrested by the police at about nine o'clock in the morning, and that he was escorted to the outskirts of Florence with the most positive orders to leave the Tuscan territory with the least possible delay. These facts Antonia had ascertained from the landlord of the lodgings which Paoli had recently occupied and who had become interested in the unfortunate Neapolitan refugee.

Ciprina was alarmed lest the intelligence which Antonia thus brought, should produce an evil effect upon her patient; and it was with the most earnest entreaties she implored him to tranquillize his mind as much as possible. She again dismissed Antonia from the chamber; and she said, "Compose yourself to slumber, Edgar, if you can!"

"I cannot!—no, I cannot!" he answered: "but believe me, Ciprina, if you will let me discourse with you, I will exercise the utmost control over my feelings. It seems to me that there is a relief to the horror and anguish as well as the rage which fill my mind,—there is a relief, I say, in making known all that occupies my thoughts. Suffer me therefore to converse with you!"

"If you will talk as you are now speaking, in a subdued tone and without vehemence of accent. Proceed, Edgar," said Ciprina; "what have you to tell me? or what have you to ask?"

"Tell me in the first instance," said Marcellin, "how I came under your kind care——"

"I will tell you," interrupted Ciprina. "In the midst of the grand entertainment which the Marchioness gave this evening, a purse was thrown through the window——"

"Yea—by Signor Paoli's hand," rejoined Marcellin. "He had received it from the Marchioness herself——"

"Ah! then the Marchioness has seen Paoli?" ejaculated Ciprina.

"Oh! I perceive that you have much to learn," interjected Edgar; "and I rejoice on your account that it is so—because it proves to me how

completely you have been ignorant of the dark crimes committed by the Marchioness, and therefore how free from everything akin to a guilty sympathy with that vile woman. Listen, Ciprina: I promise you not to speak too quickly—I will not excite myself—but I will give you a narrative of circumstances with which you ought to be acquainted."

Edgar Marcellin proceeded to unfold the promised history. He began by explaining to Ciprina how he had been accused by the Marchioness of the assassination of Giulio—how certain circumstances had actually combined to give a colour to the charge—and how, yielding to the terror which such a horrible position naturally created in his mind, he had fled precipitately from Florence.

"Yes," said Ciprina; "and the Marchioness told me at the time that you were the murderer, and that you had confessed it—and I believed her! Alas, yes! I believed her!—for as she told me the tale, it all seemed strong against you—and the circumstance of your flight appeared to be completely damning. Yes—until last night did I believe in your guilt! And now proceed, Edgar."

Marcellin went on to relate how, on quitting Florence, he had returned into France—and how he had been there subjected to another charge which was as false as the one from which he had fled in Florence. He stated how he went to London, and there lived in poverty and obscurity. But he did not mention a syllable about Corinna Paoli: he had not the moral courage to confess to Ciprina that during the interval of absence he had so completely lost sight of her image as to become devotedly attached to another. Besides, he thought—and naturally too—that the moment when he was indebted to her for life-saving ministrations was not the very one to be chosen for the revelation of such a secret. As he did not mention anything about Corinna, he said nothing of his visits to Sidney Villa: but he accounted by some other means for his knowledge that Signor Paoli had come to Florence and had received the assurance that he (Edgar Marcellin) was the murderer of his son Giulio.

"And it was just at that time," continued Edgar,—“namely, about ten or twelve days ago, that a remarkable coincidence took place. I fell in with Lisetta——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Ciprina: "that same Lisetta——"

"The confidential lady's-maid of the Marchioness," rejoined Edgar, "and who introduced me to your presence—you remember on what occasion, Ciprina?"

"And she left a few days after the murder of Giulio," said the young lady.

"Yea—and I will tell you wherefore," resumed Marcellin: "I will explain to you everything which at that time came to the knowledge of Lisetta, and which she herself revealed to me, as I have already told you, some ten or twelve days back. It appears that on the day after the murder of Giulio, Lisetta came up from the villa in the Vale of Arno to the town-mansion, as she was seldom long separated from her mistress. Lisetta loved Giulio dearly: but this was a secret which she retained within her own bosom. She was

deeply afflicted at his tragical end; but she veiled the extreme anguish of her mind, for fear lest she should betray the love that she bore for the deceased youth, and which she had always been the more anxious to conceal as she was no stranger to the fact that her mistress was wont to bestow her favours on him. There was something peculiar in Giulio's manner and conduct at the time when I was introduced to your chamber at the villa; and Lisetta could not comprehend the motives from which Giulio seemed to be acting a singular part. She questioned him: but he would not give her any satisfactory answer: he was in a hurry to depart on horseback—he went away—and Lisetta never more beheld him alive. There was thus a mystery connected with the circumstances preceding the youth's death, which rendered the tragedy itself all the more mysterious in the estimation of Lisetta. She was bewildering her mind with painful conjectures, when accident brought her to the commencement of a clue which filled her with the gravest and darkest suspicions, and induced her to leave the service of the Marchioness. Ah! by the bye, now that I bethink me," ejaculated Marcellin, "there were certain objects which I had with me in the picture-gallery——"

"A pistol and a suit of clothes?" asked Ciprina quickly.

"The same. Where are they?"—and it was with feverish anxiety that Edgar put the question.

"Tranquillize yourself," said Ciprina; "for I now perceive that there must be some importance attaching itself to those objects! They are as—I took possession of them—they are here!"

"That pistol," said Edgar,—"it is the weapon with which the unfortunate Giulio Paoli was slain!—and that male costume belongs to the Marchioness herself!"

"And how know you," demanded Ciprina, "that the beautifully chased weapon was used for so horrible a purpose?"

"Listen to the narrative of what happened to Lisetta," rejoined Marcellin; "and you will begin to see far more clearly into the depths of all these mysteries. I have already said that Lisetta returned to the town-mansion from the villa on the day following the assassination. In the evening she was engaged in the arrangement of her mistress's boudoir, toilet-chamber, and bed-room; and it happened that the maid whose turn it was to assist in those duties, was indisposed or else absent—and Lisetta preferred to be alone with her own thoughts rather than to invoke the aid of another dependant. She had the key of the wardrobe; she bethought herself of seeing whether all the dresses were in proper order; and in the course of this proceeding, she happened to open a drawer in which there was a pistol-case. She knew that the Marchioness possessed this pistol-case; for it had belonged to her deceased husband, who had highly prized it. While arranging some articles of dress that were in the same drawer, she was surprised to find that there was a quantity of black powder scattered amongst those articles. She brought the lamp nearer to see what could be the cause,—when to her sudden alarm she noticed that there was a powder-flask the top of which had by some means come off and the contents had partially poured out. Lisetta hastily put the lamp

to a distance: a falling spark would have caused an explosion, either killing her, or at least disfiguring her for life. A further examination showed that the pistol-case itself had been recently opened, for the spring of the lid had not caught. Lisetta was more and more astonished: she looked at the weapons—she found that one of them had been very recently used, while the other was all bright. She was growing bewildered: strange ideas already began to float in her mind, yet scarcely taking the form of suspicions. She still further investigated the contents of the wardrobe: she found the suit of male apparel which she knew her mistress possessed; and there were unmistakable evidences that it had been very lately used. It was all dusty: it had been hurriedly rolled up and tossed into a drawer. What could be the meaning of this? There was visible haste in the way in which the clothes had been flung into one drawer—the powder-flask into another,—likewise in the way in which the pistol had been disposed of in its case. Lisetta grew frightened; for now there were indeed suspicions arising in her mind. After some reflection she descended to the stables; and on some pretext or another she got into conversation with the groom who had special charge of the Marchioness di Mirano's own favourite riding-horse. From this man she dexterously elicited the fact that on the preceding evening the Marchioness had descended in male costume, by means of a private door opening into that part of the stable establishment—that she had ordered her steed to be accoutred with a saddle suiting the sex she was assuming—and having enjoined the groom to strict silence, she rode away. She was absent about a couple of hours, perhaps not so much; and the groom, according to previous instructions, was in readiness to receive her with all due circumstances of secrecy. On hearing this statement, Lisetta's suspicions were strengthened, if not absolutely confirmed. She however saw that the groom himself attached no particular importance to the incident: it was not the first time that his mistress had indulged in what he took to be a whimsical freak or else a love-intrigue of some kind; and Lisetta did not communicate her own suspicions nor excite those of the domestic. She was shocked and stupefied; and she considered it necessary to collect other proofs before she adopted any determined step. On her return to the dressing-chamber, she contented herself with marking the particular pistol which presented the evidences of such recent use; and she left the two drawers just in the same state as that in which she found them, so that the Marchioness might not know she had looked into them at all. She waited to see whether the Marchioness would order her to put the contents of the drawers to rights—and if so, what explanation she would give in reference to their disturbed condition. But on the following evening, when Lisetta again happened to be by herself in that suite of rooms, she found the garments had been carefully brushed and folded in a proper manner—the pistol had been cleaned—the top screwed upon the powder flask—and all the powder which had escaped was cleared away. Lisetta felt convinced that none of her companion-damels had been ordered to do this work, and

that therefore it was a task which her mistress had performed for herself. This was another strengthening proof on the one hand; but on the other it had effaced the very evidences which in the first instance had raised Lisetta's suspicions. She was however more than at first convinced that the Marchioness was the authoress of the unfortunate Giulio's death. But how could he have offended her? Lisetta began to obtain a glimmering clue to the mystery. She had some time previously fathomed the fact that the Marchioness had conceived a passion for me——"

"For you?" ejaculated Ciprina.

"Yes—for me," responded Marcellin. "Ah! doubtless the Marchioness played the hypocrite with us both at the time!—for an adept is she in every species of dissimulation. It was Giulio who instructed me how to repair to the villa, to seek Lisetta, and inquire of her for the Marchioness; while it was to you yourself, Ciprina, that I was introduced!"

"And what did all this mean?" asked Ciprina, in astonishment.

"It meant that Giulio himself was playing an underhand game," continued Edgar, "and throwing me into your arms. And why should he do this? Did he not passionately love the Marchioness? Yes!—Lisetta assures me that he did; and thus his object was evident. It was to frustrate the passion which the Marchioness had conceived for me!"

"Ah! now I comprehend," exclaimed Ciprina; "and the web is disentangling itself!"

"Conjecture only can fill up the remainder of the narrative," continued Edgar,—"unless the guilty Marchioness should ever be led to confess its details. We must suppose that Giulio's stratagem became by some means known to the Marchioness—that her vindictive feelings were excited when she found how Giulio had disposed of me, his rival in her ladyship's love, by throwing me into the arms of you, her rival in my love! Yes—these are the details which conjecture supplies; and it is thus that Lisetta's ingenuity fathomed the whole intricacy of the plot and gave shape and form to the reasons which must have so powerfully induced Lucrezia di Mirano to avenge herself so terribly upon Giulio."

"Just heaven!" murmured Ciprina; "it must be indeed as Lisetta conjectured it, and as you have now explained it to me!"

"But I have more to tell you," resumed Edgar Marcellin. "Lisetta, after having for some three or four years been a loving and affectionate adherent of the Marchioness di Mirano, conceived a deadly hatred for her, and vowed in the depths of her soul to avenge, if possible, poor Giulio's death. Yet she knew not how to act; for though she entertained the firm conviction that her mistress was the assassin, yet she had the good sense to perceive that the proofs would be held insignificant in the extreme by any magistrate who might be appealed to. She kept a watch upon her mistress: she followed her unperceived into the picture-gallery; and then she beheld a scene which riveted the conviction that was in her mind, if indeed any further proof were wanting so far as her own opinion was concerned. She saw the Marchioness contemplate, with ghastliest looks and with eyes full of horror, the portrait of

Lucrezia Borgia. And then, under the influence of some terribly agitated feeling, the Marchioness apostrophized that portrait in some such terms as these:—'Oh! is it fated to be that one Lucrezia proves to be the prototype of the other? Is Lucrezia Borgia to be regarded by the world as not more exquisite in beauty nor more diabolical in heart than Lucrezia Mirano? Are the two Lucrezias to become equally infamous in the annals of crime? Oh! the destiny of one has been long ago fulfilled: that of the other is yet to receive its accomplishment!'—It was in such a strain as this that the conscience-stricken, the trembling, and affrighted Marchioness spoke audibly, in wild accents of anguish, while Lisetta remained an unseen listener in the gallery."

"This is dreadful! absolutely dreadful!" said Ciprina, with a strong shudder.

"Lisetta," continued Edgar Marcellin, "was more than ever convinced, I repeat, of the guilt of her mistress: but still were the proofs insufficient to satisfy a tribunal of justice. The girl was at first bewildered how to act,—until she thought herself of making known everything to the murdered Giulio's family, whom she knew to be in England. She accordingly withdrew on some plausible pretext from the Marchioness di Mirano's service: she proceeded to London—but she failed to discover the Paoli family for many long, long months. In short, it was only the other day that she obtained the slightest clue to that which she had so long been seeking. At the same time accident threw her in my way, as I have already told you——"

"And then from her lips you learnt all these things?" said Ciprina. "And what was your plan of proceeding?"

"I myself saw at once," returned Edgar Marcellin, "that the proofs were inefficient for the condemnation of the guilty woman before a tribunal of justice—especially in a country where wealth and rank have so many chances and opportunities of securing impunity for crime. I therefore determined to adopt a course which should enable me to work upon the terrors of the Marchioness, and extort from her a confession of her guilt. Aided by the information which on all requisite points I received from Lisetta, I last evening penetrated within the walls of this mansion. From the dressing-chamber of the Marchioness I procured the suit of male apparel which she no doubt wore at the time when the murder was perpetrated; I procured likewise the pistol which discharged the winged messenger of death, and which is easily distinguishable by the mark which Lisetta made upon the handle. These objects I took with me to the picture-gallery: a note which I left on the boudoir brought the Marchioness——"

"Which note I have seen," interjected Ciprina. "I picked it up in the boudoir; and it was the cause of my proceeding to the gallery in time to rescue you from another attack which the murderer would have assuredly made upon you at the slightest sign of life."

"Yes—that note brought the Marchioness to the gallery," continued Edgar; "and then, in a voice solemnly disguised, I repeated from the neighbourhood of the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia,

the very words which the Marchioness had used in apostrophe to that portrait a day or two after the murder of Giulio, and when she was overboard by Lisetta. Little had I foreseen the consequences of this proceeding on my part! I had pictured to myself Lucrezia Mirano sinking down at my feet, all quivering and trembling, and then utterly annihilated, when (according to my intention) I should have produced the pistol and her own suit of masculine apparel, as proofs that everything was known, and to convince her how useless it were to deny her guilt. But how different was everything that ensued! The sharp-pointed dagger was thrust against me—a preternatural courage must have inspired that bold bad woman:—a fierce vindictive rage must have taken possession of her; and instead of herself succumbing, it was I who fell vanquished and unconscious at her feet! But though for the present she has triumphed—though I am stretched here powerless—chained as it were to this couch—yet must the day inevitably come when retribution shall overtake the murderess!”

“And now enough! speak not another word! let a seal be placed upon your lips, Edgar!” said Ciprina urgently; “for you have already spoken far too much, and you must feel exhausted!”

It must not be supposed that Edgar Marcellin's narrative was given in so uninterruptedly continuous a form as we have shaped it. It occupied a much longer period in the recital than it now takes to read, from the simple fact that the wounded man was compelled at brief intervals to pause in order to obtain breath and to rest himself; and on several occasions Ciprina would not suffer him to continue until he had moistened his throat with some refreshing beverage. And then too, every time his language appeared to be swelling into excitement, Ciprina broke in upon his discourse and besought him to soothe his mind ere he continued. Thus was it that the utmost care was taken by his tender and thoughtful nurse to prevent him from exciting himself too much; and in this manner the narrative was prolonged—or rather, we should say, the period which its recital occupied was lengthened, and upwards of an hour elapsed while Ciprina was listening to these explanations.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET PASSAGE IN THE WALL.

It has been more than once stated that the arrangements of the Mirano mansion afforded facilities for the secret intrigues and gallantries of the Marchioness; and we have likewise observed that when Ciprina settled beneath that roof, she was duly initiated into the mystery of the arrangements to which we have just alluded. But still there were two or three secrets connected with the mansion which the Marchioness had kept to herself,—not exactly because she had ever at any moment experienced a want of confidence in Ciprina,—nor because she could ever have possibly foreseen the probability of those secrets becoming useful to herself; but she had kept them—partly because she had really deemed at the

time that it was useless to take the trouble to reveal them, and partly perhaps because the existence of a mystery in a house is well calculated to imbue some minds with a species of idea or belief that a mystery it ought to remain.

The Mirano mansion was in reality an old building which had been considerably renovated by the deceased Marquis, Lucrezia's husband; and so great were the improvements effected by his lordship that any one would have stared with incredulity on being informed that the structure was not altogether a modern one. So far from this being the fact, there was a portion of it which was ancient enough, and which had been built in the troublous times when feuds and civil wars were of frequent occurrence in the Tuscan territory. Paint, gilding, decorations, and embellishments, had however so completely modernized the aspect of all this oldest part of the mansion, that no one when passing along particular corridors, or standing in the midst of certain rooms or landings, would be likely to conceive that the walls instead of being of light brickwork, were of heavy stone masonry. Still less would any uninitiated wanderer amidst the sumptuous mazes of that spacious mansion, have suspected that there was a partition-wall through the entire thickness of which ran a passage. Yet such was the case. A door communicating with this passage opened in the wainscot of Ciprina's ante-chamber, and so exquisitely was this door fitted—so perfectly was it adjusted in its setting, that no eye however keen could detect its existence. The reader now knows where the secret passage terminated at one extremity: we have next to speak of the other end. There a deep wall-staircase led down into the lower part of the mansion—or, in plainer terms, descended into a cellar-like place whence there was a door opening into one of the stable-yards. There can be no doubt that these mysterious arrangements were contrived to enable the owners of the Mirano mansion, in the olden times of trouble, to escape at any moment unobserved and unsuspected by means of that passage, that staircase, and that door opening into the stable-yard and which seemed merely to constitute the entrance to a basement cellar. The late Marquis of Mirano, when renovating and embellishing his paternal mansion, had retained all these mysterious arrangements,—not because he could possibly suppose they would ever again serve any human purpose, but for just the same reason that he preserved anything else connected with his ancestors and which sustained or corroborated the historic associations belonging to his race.

Ciprina, as we have said, remained utterly ignorant of the existence of this passage, one extremity of which communicated with her ante-chamber. She occupied a suite of rooms consisting of this ante-chamber, a boudoir, and two bed-chambers, opening from one into another,—the outer door being that of the ante-chamber. Thus Ciprina naturally believed that if the outer door of the ante-chamber were secured, no one could possibly obtain admittance into her suite of apartments. The reader has by this time comprehended that it was otherwise; for the door of the secret passage opened into that ante-chamber. Ah! if Ciprina had suspected this, how she would have trembled to leave Edgar Marcellin by himself



when she returned to the picture-gallery after the tragedy, or when she issued forth from the mansion to visit the house of La Dolcina!

It would be impossible to describe the state of mind experienced by the Marchioness of Mirano as she contemplated the turn which circumstances had taken. Still she did not lose her fortitude—she was not completely overwhelmed: she was racked by the most torturing fears—but she had energy sufficient to adopt whatsoever means might appear to present themselves for warding off the threatening exposure and ruin. At an early hour in the morning—as early indeed as eight o'clock—she despatched a note to the Count of Ramorino, informing him that the Neapolitan refugee Paoli had been seen hanging about the neighbourhood of her mansion on the preceding evening, and begging therefore that he might be at once expelled from Florence. The Minister of Police—who, as we have seen, was most anxious to

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please the Marchioness of Mirano—sent back an answer to the effect that within the hour that was then passing the troublesome Paoli should be beyond the precincts of Florence: and the reader has seen, through the medium of the information obtained by Antonia, how faithfully Count Ramorino's pledge was fulfilled. This was one point gained by the Marchioness of Mirano. Paoli—who, as she well knew, must have hurled the purse through her drawing-room window—was expelled from the Tuscan territory; and Lucrezia determined to take very good care that no other Italian State should harbour him—so that she might say to herself, "Let him raise the voice of accusation against me in any other clime, what matters it?"

Paoli therefore was disposed of—or at least so thought and hoped the Marchioness. And now what was to be done in respect to Edgar Marcelin? Ciprina had thrown a protecting shield

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over him; the Marchioness did not fear that Ciprina would betray her fatal secret or take the slightest step to do her an injury: but on the other hand arose the bewildering question—"Will Ciprina's influence avail to put a seal upon the lips of Edgar Marcellin?"

"No—it is not probable!" thought the Marchioness within herself. "Edgar must know that I have accused him—and if he live, he will do everything he can to vindicate himself and bring the guilt home to me! And who can tell to what extent he may possess proofs against me? Those words—those terrible words which he repeated! Yes—they were indeed from my lips! I remember that I addressed them, in agony of mind, to the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia, within a few days after the vengeance that I wreaked upon Giulio! How, in heaven's name, could those words have become known to Edgar Marcellin? who could have overheard them? who could have repeated them?"

And as the Marchioness asked herself these questions, her mind was enduring a perfect agony of bewilderment and of terror.

"But no matter!" she mentally ejaculated, thus resuming the train of her perturbed reflections: "conjecture is useless!—it is sufficient for me to know that in Edgar Marcellin I have an accuser who may perhaps be enabled to overwhelm me with the weight of evidence! And can I suppose that he will place a seal upon his lips at Ciprina's bidding? No!—I dare not indulge in such a hope! But, Ah! have I not the means of ascertaining what takes place between them so soon as he shall have recovered the power of speech—if he ever do recover it? There is for me the grand chance that he may die!—But Oh! w! at if he should live?"

An expression of illimitable terror passed over the features of the Marchioness, as imagination torturingly and hideously pictured the exposure of her crime—her arrest—the wonder and scorn of the world—the triumph of her rivals—the horrors of a prison—the branding shame of a public trial—and the agony of the scaffold!

"My God! my God!" she murmured to herself, as she wrung her hands; "I must do everything—Ob, yes! I must do everything to avert this hideous catastrophe!"

Lucrezia di Mirano sat reflecting for a little longer in her boudoir; and she presently asked herself, "Why does not Ciprina come to me, if only for a moment?—why does she not send some message to prove that she remembers the pledge she gave me last night that she would never betray me, but that if I were guilty she would do all she could to shield and protect me? Is it possible that her sentiments can be changing? Ah! perhaps Edgar Marcellin may have recovered the faculty of speech?—and who can tell what things he may have been enabled to reveal to the ears of Ciprina? Ah! fool that I was not to have been ere now upon the watch! Just heaven! is mine a predicament which can afford to throw away a single chance or lose the slightest favourable opportunity?"

Lucrezia di Mirano quitted the boudoir; and passing out upon the landing, descended that private staircase which has already been several times mentioned in the course of this narrative. On

reaching the vestibule at the bottom, the Marchioness passed out into the stable-yard. If she had been observed by any menial, she would have pretended that she came to see and caress her favourite horse; but as no one saw her, she bent her steps rapidly towards a little low door deeply set in the solid brickwork forming the basement-part of the mansion. A key which she had in readiness at once opened the door;—she closed it behind her, and began ascending a spiral stone staircase leading upward in a circular form like the steps in a church-steeple. And now in a few minutes the Marchioness di Mirano reached that narrow passage which existed in the thickness of one of the partition walls. No light could penetrate into that place, and Lucrezia had brought no lamp; but she cautiously groped her way. She had occasionally visited the mysterious corridor through curiosity, and she could therefore estimate its length. She knew there was no danger of stumbling over any object or encountering any obstacle: but the great point of requisite caution was to avoid coming noisily in contact with the wainscot-door at the extremity. Lucrezia therefore felt her way with the utmost carefulness; and presently her hand gently encountered the wooden barrier which closed the passage at that farther end.

Lucrezia listened against the door; and just at that moment she heard Ciprina bidding Antonia leave the suite of apartments for the present, and only return when she should hear the summons of the bell. Then the Marchioness heard the outer door close: she heard likewise Ciprina lock it inside.

"She is determined to be altogether alone with the invalid," thought the Marchioness to herself. "Perhaps they are about to converse together?—and she seeks to render the place secure against eavesdroppers? Ah, well! we shall see!"

The Marchioness heard Ciprina recross the ante-chamber from the door which she had just been fastening, and penetrate into the boudoir. Then all was silent. Vainly did Lucrezia listen with suspended breath: she could not catch the slightest tone of a human voice.

"Ah!" she thought within herself, in a humour of bitterest vexation, "if they be in the innermost room together, I may fruitlessly tarry here to listen! Dare I open this door? The attempt will be desperate!—it may lead to discovery! And yet there is no alternative!"

Having come to this decision, the Marchioness cautiously felt for an iron knob which she knew to constitute a communication with a secret spring; and the door at once yielded to its influence, opening slightly inward. Again the Marchioness listened with suspended breath. Now she did catch the sound of a human voice—and she recognised it to be Ciprina's. Then Edgar Marcellin spoke: but still Lucrezia di Mirano was too far off to catch the sense of what was said by either.

"They are in one of the farther rooms!" she thought to herself; "and it is not from this point that I shall be enabled to overhear anything! A still bolder step than that of opening the door must be taken!"

And now the Marchioness opened the secret door to its full width: and stealing across the threshold, she entered the ante-chamber. Thence

she passed into the boudoir; and here she paused to listen. Everything that was taking place between Edgar Marcellin and Ciprina was now plainly audible; and Lucrezia—riveted to the spot close by the threshold of the boudoir's inner door—drank in the whole discourse. She judged from something which Ciprina said, that the young lady did indeed mean to keep her promise and do the best she could to shield her; and for a moment Lucrezia experienced a feeling of relief. But then the next instant Edgar Marcellin proved by his own excited language that he himself was implacable; and Lucrezia's blood ran cold with horror. Then Marcellin soon began to enter on those explanations which we have already laid before our readers. Lucrezia listened with increasing wonderment, horror, and dread: for she now for the first time learnt that she had been all along suspected by Liette. Yes! and she now learnt too the nature and variety of the proofs which had been gathered against her: but there was again a momentary sensation of relief on hearing it admitted by Edgar Marcellin that these proofs were insufficient to condemn her in the presence of a tribunal of justice. She heard on to the end,—down to the point where Marcellin left off speaking at the close of the preceding chapter. Yes—and the young Frenchman's last words struck with the violence of a blow upon her heart; for he had declared that *the day must inevitably come when retribution should overtake the murderess!*

And all the time that Edgar was giving his explanations to Ciprina, did Lucrezia di Mireno remain a listener in that boudoir. She was riveted to the spot:—but how manifold were the transitions of strong feelings and emotions which during that space she experienced! At length, so soon as Ciprina began to bid Edgar Marcellin put a seal upon his lips for the present, Lucrezia glided back again to the secret door in the wainscot: she closed that door—she groped her way along the darkness of the stone passage—she descended the spiral staircase—and in a few minutes she regained her boudoir, unperceived by a soul.

"Now I know everything!" she mentally ejaculated, as she flung herself upon a seat—"yes, everything! To what conclusion must I come? That Marcellin possesses sufficient proofs to condemn me? or that I may take courage and defy him? No, no! I have not the power to hurl defiance at him! May he not stand forward and accuse me of having attempted his life?—and will not *this* be sufficient to condemn me of the other crime likewise? And then too, Ciprina might be won over by Marcellin—she might state what took place between herself and me in the picture-gallery: it would be construed into a complete admission of my guilt and the deed would be brought home to me! Then what am I to do? Can I be safe while *they* live?—or must *they* not die in order that *I* may feel secure?"

But let us not dwell any longer upon the meditations of the wretched woman. Suffice it to say that having already taken the first steps on the pathway of crime, she found it impossible to retreat—but on the contrary, that she was impelled forward as if by the irresistible necessity of perpetrating fresh iniquities to conceal the former ones!

Some hours passed away; and Edgar Marcellin slept calmly for a while after that long discourse with Ciprina, and after having somewhat exhausted himself by the explanations he had given. The wound, so far as the young lady could judge, had a perfectly satisfactory appearance: and inasmuch as Edgar had just slept with so much tranquillity, she thought that it would be unnecessary to apply to La Dolina for any fresh medicament. At all events Ciprina knew that it was easy for her to slip forth at any moment and visit the wise-woman, no matter at what hour of the night it might be.

As she sat by Edgar Marcellin's couch, after he had awakened from this last slumber to which we have alluded, she could not help feeling towards him a degree of tenderness such as for no other person had she ever experienced. She began to comprehend that it was indeed something different from the passions that had hitherto been excited within her bosom,—very different likewise from everything she had felt at the time when Edgar Marcellin was first clasped in her arms at the villa in the Vale of Arno. Could it be that she was experiencing the germs of a pure and chaste love for the young Frenchman? Yes—she fancied that it must be so; and as the idea gradually expanded in her mind, it imparted a glow to her countenance—it infused into her eyes a purer and holier light than had there shone for a long time past—and it gave an ethereal effect to the otherwise sensuous style and voluptuous character of her beauty.

Now, at this interval of which we are speaking, Edgar Marcellin was again endeavouring, at Ciprina's urgent entreaty, to compose himself to sleep; for she knew well that it was complete mental tranquillity that he most required, and that his thoughts when awake must naturally produce a pernicious physical excitement. Marcellin closed his eyes in order to please his tender and affectionate nurse; but at that time he had really no longer an inclination for sleep. He lay thinking upon all that had recently happened,—wondering what course he should have to pursue in order to bring the Marchioness to justice, and how long it was likely he should be stretched upon that couch. And then he thought of Corinna Paoli, the beautiful Neapolitan girl, who had won his heart, and the death of whose brother Giulio he had sworn to avenge! A painful feeling crept over him as he thus thought of Corinna. Would not Ciprina claim his allegiance after having saved his life? But on the other hand, was it at all necessary that he should study the feelings of the woman whom he had only known as a mistress and whom he could look upon as but little better than a courtesan, in preference to the feelings of the young girl, who was pure, chaste, and virtuous? Nevertheless, it did pain Edgar Marcellin to reflect that the day must come when he should be compelled to tell Ciprina the truth—to part from her for ever—and perhaps thereby to plunge a dagger into her heart.

While these ideas were harassing him, he slowly opened his eyes and looked up at Ciprina. Her own regards were at the moment averted from his countenance: she was looking upward in a species of rapture at those new sentiments which had been stealing into her mind. Never

had she seemed more admirably beautiful to the eyes of Edgar Marcellin!—and he was at the moment struck by the fact that there was something ethereal in her loveliness—something that denoted the sentiment independent of the sense—the sublimation of fine feelings above a voluptuous grossness! Then Marcellin again shut his eyes that he might give way to his reflections; for he could not at the moment address a syllable to Ciprina: he felt that if he did, he should inevitably betray to her the thoughts that were passing in his mind. Edgar was a thorough man of the world, and understood well the human heart. What, he asked himself, could have given Ciprina that aspect for a moment? Did he not know that she was of a nature luxuriously sensuous?—how then did her features shine with the radiance of a chaste and holy light at that instant? A little meditation soon enabled him to solve the mystery. Ciprina was learning to love him with a feeling that was new to herself!—loving him as one whom she had rescued from death—raised up as it were from the dead—and on whom therefore she would have an immense claim for the rest of his existence! These reflections troubled Edgar Marcellin, and he saw that when the time for explanations should come, the task would prove even more painful than he had at first anticipated.

But let us pursue the thread of our narrative. It was near midnight—and still Ciprina sat by the couch of the patient. Antonia had long before been dismissed to her own chamber; and therefore the outer door of Ciprina's suite of rooms was carefully secured. Edgar Marcellin—who for the last two or three hours had not been able to close his eyes in slumber again, on account of the thoughts that were occupying him—had nevertheless pretended all this while to be asleep. He now slowly opened his eyes, and he perceived that Ciprina's lids were drooping heavily and that her head was reclining upon her bosom, as if she were yielding to the irresistible influence of drowsiness. But all in a moment she started, with that instinctive feeling which makes the watcher aware that the sick one who is watched is looking up from the pillow:—and now Ciprina bent her regards all luminous with love upon Edgar Marcellin.

"You have had a long sleep," she said, in her most gentle accents: "may I hope that it has been refreshing?"

"Yes, Ciprina," he murmured: "I feel now so much better—you know not how much better I feel! And in a very few minutes I shall sink off into slumber again——"

"Oh, I am rejoiced to hear you speak thus hopefully!" murmured Ciprina.

"But you, my kind and affectionate nurse," said Marcellin; "you must stand in need of rest? Oh! I am sure you must! Pray do not tell me that it is otherwise, Ciprina! Do I not know that the whole of last night was a sleepless one for you?—do I not know likewise that throughout this day you have been harassed on my account? In short, Ciprina, you must be ready to sink with weariness; and if you pass this night without an hour's repose or rest, your strength will fail you——"

"Oh, fear not that it will be so!" exclaimed Ciprina. "So long as it is necessary to watch by your couch, will my energies endure——"

"No, my kind friend," interrupted Marcellin, "it is now my turn to say that it is not so! I know what your inclination is: but your physical power is another thing. I beseech you, Ciprina, to take at least a few hours of repose! If you were to be enfeebled by these vigils—if you were to be thrown upon a bed of sickness—who would attend upon me?"

Ciprina was struck by the truth conveyed by this question; and she murmured to herself, "Yes, indeed! if I were prostrated by exhaustion, who would minister unto him?—who would protect him? Would he not fall an easy victim to the dagger or the poison of that vile woman if she thought fit to make another attempt upon his life?"

"Believe me, dear Ciprina," said Marcellin, urgently and entreatingly, "you may in all safety retire for a few hours! Slumber will soon settle again upon my own eyelids; and indeed my mind will become all the more tranquil if I know that you are not exhausting yourself on my account."

"Well then, Edgar," answered the young lady, "I will do as you desire. I shall withdraw into the adjacent chamber, and there repose for a few hours. But here is your cooling beverage—here too is a bell which I place at your bedside—and you will be sure to ring it if you require anything. And now compose yourself to sleep again."

Ciprina bent down and kissed her patient's brow. She had several times before bestowed kisses upon him since he lay stretched on that couch; but those were always on the lips. Now, as we have said, it was on the forehead that the caress was imprinted; and the circumstance was to Edgar's mind a corroboration of the idea which he had formed in respect to the refined sentiment that Ciprina was entertaining towards him.

The young lady filled a tumbler with lemonade—she also placed a little silver bell on the table by the side of Edgar's couch: she then withdrew into the next room, leaving the door of communication partly open, so that she could not possibly fail to hear the summons of that bell. We must observe that the chamber occupied by Edgar Marcellin was the fourth or innermost one of the suite—while that into which Ciprina now retired was consequently the third. Next came the boudoir, or elegantly furnished sitting-room; and then the ante-chamber. The reader will be pleased to bear these circumstances in mind.

It was in the chamber to which Ciprina had now withdrawn, that she had suspended the portrait of Lucretia Borgia. As she disapparelled herself, she contemplated that portrait, thus apostrophizing it in her thoughts:—"If by any accident, means, or chance, she of whom thou wast the prototype were to penetrate into this chamber with iniquitous design, she would start back in horror on beholding thee! Be thou therefore unto me, as well as unto him over whom I watch,—be thou a talisman and a protection!—for it was for this purpose that I brought thee hither and placed thee there!"

Having disapparelled herself, Ciprina combed out the long luxuriant masses of her raven hair; and when her night-toilet was completed, she entered her bed. She knew that if she only slept thus for a single hour it would be more refreshing

and invigorating than if she threw herself with all her clothes on upon the couch and so slept for hours. She was indeed greatly exhausted: her mind had been harassed as much as her frame was wearied; and thus mentally and physically she stood in need of repose. Confident that the suite of apartments was secured against all danger—or at least suspecting not the existence of any secret means of access thereto—Ciprina yielded to the influence of slumber; and in a few minutes sleep weighed down her eyelids.

It was about one o'clock in the morning, when the secret door in the wainscot of the ante-chamber opened upon its noiseless hinges; and the Marchioness of Mirano appeared upon the threshold. Her golden auburn hair was all floating in wild disorder over her shoulders of snowy whiteness; and there was a sinister light in her blue eyes—a dead pallor upon her countenance—an ashy whiteness upon the lips, which were not however compressed, but were somewhat apart, thus indicating the suspenseful anxiety of her mind lest she should experience any interruption in the work which she had in hand. And between those ashy lips gleamed those teeth the vivid whiteness of which, at other times so exquisite an accessory to the lady's beauty, now rendered her countenance all the more ghastly in its expression.

Slowly did that secret door open; and Lucrezia Mirano, placing the lamp which she carried in a niche in the passage-wall, peeped cautiously into the ante-chamber. No one was there. A second glance showed her that the door leading into the boudoir stood ajar. With noiseless steps she crossed the ante-chamber—she approached that door—she peeped into the adjoining apartment—and this was also unoccupied. For several minutes the Marchioness listened; all was still in the chambers that lay beyond: no sound of a human voice met her ears. She traversed the boudoir; and now she began very gently and cautiously to push open the door (which had likewise stood ajar) of the adjoining chamber. When it was opened sufficiently wide enough for the Marchioness to look into that room, she beheld Ciprina lying in the bed, with her eyelids closed, and her respiration indicating that she slept. A smile of fiendish satisfaction now appeared on the countenance of the Marchioness; her lips wavered for a moment—it was because she was murmuring to herself, "Everything is favourable!"

But still she remained standing for three or four minutes at the doorway to assure herself that Ciprina slept. A lamp was burning upon a table; and the Marchioness kept her eyes riveted upon the young lady. The light of that lamp was shed fully upon Ciprina's countenance, which remained placid and tranquil as is the case when one is sleeping serenely. Her bosom was bare; one beautiful hand lay upon the glowing bust; and the arm being likewise bare, revealed its exquisite modelling. The entire posture was that of the complete self-abandonment of slumber; and no doubt was left in the mind of the Marchioness but that Ciprina slept.

There was a tumbler half-filled with some refreshing beverage on the table near Ciprina's bed; and towards that table did the Marchioness di Mirano now slowly advance, gliding noiseless as a

ghost. Then from beneath the folds of her garments she drew forth a small phial; and she poured two or three drops of its contents into the tumbler. Whether it were that she fancied that she had poured out too much and that the beverage might become turbid with the effect of those few drops—or whether it were to estimate that she had poured sufficient in proportion with the liquid that was previously in the glass—we cannot precisely say. Certain however it was that the Marchioness took up the tumbler and was about to hold it closer to the light, when at that moment she caught sight of the eyes of Lucrezia Borgia looking down upon her from the canvass suspended to the wall. Lucrezia di Mirano started with sudden horror and affright; for little indeed had she expected to encounter the portrait there! She had not even recollected her urgent request of the preceding night that Ciprina would remove that portrait from the picture-gallery! And now she not only started, but a cry rose up to the very edge of her lips—to the very tip of her tongue,—and it was a marvel that she was enabled to catch it back, as it were, ere it pealed forth. Yet in this she succeeded: for all in a moment she felt a keen vivid sense of the predicament in which she was placed.

That start however was sufficient to arouse Ciprina into completest wakefulness: she opened her eyes—but she closed them again as quick as the lids themselves could twinkle; for she beheld and recognised the Marchioness! And here, on Ciprina's part, was an evidence of self-possession momentarily asserted, as great as that which almost at the same instant enabled the Marchioness to keep back the scream which had risen to the very brim of her lips.

Notwithstanding the immensity of the impression made upon the mind of Lucrezia Mirano by finding herself suddenly confronted as it were by the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia, she quickly recovered her fortitude: and it was with a deep concentrated bitterness of soul that she mentally ejaculated, "Ah! if it indeed be my destiny to follow that which was thine, O my prototype! it shall be accomplished! Perish every other consideration than that of sweeping all obstacles from my path!"

And while these terrible and wild ideas were sweeping through Lucrezia Mirano's mind, she flung a look upon Ciprina: but this young lady still seemed sleeping profoundly. Having replaced the tumbler upon the table, the Marchioness poured a few drops from the phial into the decanter of water which stood upon the toilet-table; and then she again glanced towards the couch to assure herself that Ciprina slept. Still confident on this point, the Marchioness now peeped into the adjacent room; and there she beheld Edgar Marcellin stretched in the bed that was there; and she murmured to herself, "*He* likewise is sleeping profoundly!"

At the same moment Ciprina was saying to her own self, "It is not with the dagger the wretched murderess is now working!—it is with subtle poison! I will remain silent and tranquil, that I may the better fathom all her proceedings!"

Being thus confident that no deed of violence was meditated immediately and at once against Edgar Marcellin, Ciprina was not very much

alarmed when she found Lucrezia Mirano remaining for three or four minutes in the adjoining chamber. Besides, all was perfectly still therein: there was no sudden movement as if a murderous blow were dealt; but the serpent was evidently gliding noiselessly about, infusing its venom into every vessel containing a beverage likely to be applied to human lips. At length the Marchioness did Mirano come forth from the inner chamber: she flung another passing look upon Ciprina, who continued to simulate the profoundest sleep; and likewise having darted a last shuddering glance at the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia, Lucrezia Mirano proceeded into the boudoir. Then, light as a snow-flake falling upon the earth—light as a feather sinking upon the grass—did Ciprina descend from her couch. The Marchioness had left the door ajar, just as she had found it: Ciprina was therefore enabled at once to follow Lucrezia with her looks. She saw her traverse the boudoir and enter the ante-room. Across the boudoir now glided Ciprina likewise,—thus unseen and noiselessly following in the track of the vile woman who was departing. A peep from the next half-open door—and what did Ciprina behold? The Marchioness disappearing through the wainscot of the ante-chamber—and that wainscot instantaneously becoming whole in substance, level in surface, and uniform in aspect as Ciprina had ever known it to be!

Could she believe her own vision? She drew her hand across her eyes. Had she been dreaming? Had she been following a phantom of the imagination? No!—her mind was too deeply impressed with the conviction of the reality of it all! And now, therefore, in a moment did the suspicion of a secret door flash to Ciprina's brain! Yea—this must be the solution of the mystery! A cold shudder swept throughout the young lady's form—a glacial chill seemed to strike to her heart, as she thought within herself, "At the very moment when I deemed myself secure, peril the most tremendous was hovering around me!"

Ciprina sprang forward into the ante-chamber, and pressed her hands hard against that part of the wainscot which she had seen close behind the Marchioness a few moments before: but she met with a complete resistance—nothing yielded to her touch. Then she hastily placed a chair in a slanting position against that part of the wainscot, so that if the door were again opened inward, the chair might fall in the same direction. All this was the result of nervous excitement and terror on Ciprina's part: but now she suddenly regained her fortitude—and she mentally ejaculated, "Insensate that I am! Lucrezia will not return to these rooms this night! The murderers think that her work is done, and that she will never again behold either Edgar or myself in the land of the living!—But let me see if Edgar still sleeps!"

Ciprina, judging from what had taken place in her own chamber, had not the slightest doubt that every decanter, jug, and tumbler in Edgar's room was likewise poisoned. She therefore now glided, with her swift but noiseless naked feet, through the apartments to the innermost one of all.

"Ah, Ciprina, have I disturbed you?" inquired Marcellin, who at that very instant was replacing a tumbler upon the table by the side of his couch.

"Just heaven! what have you done?" ejaculated—or rather shrieked forth Ciprina, as she rushed forward, for she saw that the tumbler was half empty.

"What have I done?" exclaimed Marcellin, looking bewildered and aghast. "I woke up—I felt athirst—you yourself filled that tumbler with the lemonade——"

"Oh, wretch! wretch!" cried Ciprina, thus alluding to the Marchioness. "There is death in that glass!—death, Edgar!—death!"

"My God, Ciprina! what have you done?" cried the invalid, raising himself up to a sitting posture in the couch.

"Oh, heaven be thanked! I remember! I remember!"—and now Ciprina flew wildly away into the adjacent room.

In two or three moments she returned, bearing a phial in her hand; and she exclaimed, "Drink, Edgar! delay not! For heaven's sake let me pour three or four drops down your throat!"

"Ciprina, you frighten me!" ejaculated Marcellin. "No! no!"—and he repulsed her. "I will not allow a single drop——"

"Insensate! you are poisoned!" cried Ciprina, vehemently.

"My God!—and you tell me so?" exclaimed Marcellin. "Oh! what a house of infamy is this! But 'twas you, Ciprina—'twas you that prepared the lemonade!—'twas you yourself that poured it out!"

"Ah, my God!" shrieked the wretched young lady; "he believes that it is I who have poisoned him! But Ah!" she abruptly ejaculated, "I know what to do!"

She then snatched up the tumbler from the table, and she poured the remainder of its contents down her throat. But all this was accompanied by a wildness, a vehemence, and a passion which were only too well calculated to bewilder Edgar Marcellin's mind with misgivings and suspicions.

"Just heaven!" he exclaimed, "in her remorse she has poisoned herself! Wretched girl——"

"Yes, yes—I am poisoned, Edgar!" ejaculated Ciprina,—"as you also are poisoned! Therefore if we die we shall die together!—though, as I have a soul to be saved it was not I who mixed the poison in that glass! But we will live!—yes, we will both live! And behold how!"

She placed the phial to her lips and swallowed a few drops of its contents: then presenting the bottle to Edgar, she exclaimed, "This is an antidote! For heaven's sake delay not in taking it!"

Marcellin, though still terribly bewildered, nevertheless now suffered Ciprina to have her own way; and she accordingly poured some of the contents of the phial down his throat. She immediately appeared to breathe more freely—a change took place in her looks—they lost all their wildness—an expression of serene confidence succeeded to the horrified aspect her features had so recently worn—and she said, "We are now both saved, Edgar."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE APPOINTMENT AT THE VILLA.

MARCELLIN sank back upon his pillow, almost completely exhausted by the terrific excitement through which he had been hurried as if on the wildly-flapping wing of the hurricane. But he now caught somewhat of that feeling of confidence which Ciprina herself evidently experienced; he began to think that something terrible, but as yet utterly unknown to himself, must have occurred, and that he had harboured the most injurious suspicions against Ciprina.

"Tell me," he said, "what is it that has happened?"

"We have both incurred the most fearful dangers," answered Ciprina. "That fiend in human shape, Lucrezia Mirano——"

"Ah! is it possible," ejaculated Edgar, "that this demoness has again——"

"Yes—she has again sought and found opportunities of pursuing her terrible machinations," continued Ciprina; "but heaven be thanked! they have been frustrated. Ah! fortunate was it that I placed in the adjoining chamber the portrait of her prototype Lucrezia Borgia! It must have been some sudden movement which she made—or else some ejaculation from her lips—I know not which—that startled me up into a condition of completest wakefulness; and then——"

"But Oh, Ciprina!" asked Edgar, "how was it possible that she could have found her way into your apartments? Do you not think that it was some terrible hallucination?"

"Ah, no! it was a frightful reality," rejoined Ciprina. "There is a secret means of access to the ante-chamber—I saw the wainscot close behind that vile woman——"

"Oh, Ciprina!" murmured Edgar, "neither you nor I are safe within these walls!"

"Fear not," interrupted the young lady, with a voice and look that were both decisively firm. "I will baffle her in all her arts—I will defeat her in all her projects——"

"Better seek the authorities of justice at once!" ejaculated Marcellin passionately.

"No," answered Ciprina, for a moment speaking and looking with the same decisive firmness as before—and then hastily adding, "No—not yet!—such a course will not be politic! We must have better proofs than those which we possess——"

"And what better proof," demanded Edgar, "than that she dealt me the blow which has prostrated me here?"

"And what if she were to allege," asked Ciprina, "that she met in the picture-gallery a man whom she took to be a robber, and that she stabbed him, believing that it was in self-defence?"

"Then denounce her as a poisoner!" interjected Marcellin with increasing vehemence. "You yourself have beheld enough this night——"

"Tranquillize yourself—or excitement will kill you," interrupted Ciprina impressively. "Nothing that you suggest can I now do. If I were to proclaim this tale of poisoning, I should be asked how you and I escaped——"

"And how did we escape?" inquired Edgar

with something like feverish petulance. "Do you not possess an antidote——?"

"And whence came that antidote?" said Ciprina, calmly and quietly. "From the hands of a woman whom I would not have it generally known that I had visited. I am alluding to La Dolcina, to whose house in the middle of the night I went, as I have before told you, to procure medicaments for yourself. She it was who gave me the antidote. There seemed to be something like the force of prophecy itself in her words——"

"Ah, Ciprina!" said Marcellin, speaking in a voice that was feeble from exhaustion and tremulous with emotion, "all that you have just been telling me, reminds me of the many things you have done on my behalf; and the very danger you have just now incurred of perishing by poison was entailed upon you by the circumstance of your having thrown a protecting shield over me! You seem to be speaking to me in an altered tone—there is a coldness——"

"Question me not, Edgar Marcellin, on this subject," interrupted Ciprina, still firmly and yet quietly.

"And why not question you?" asked Marcellin. "Think you not that I am interested in the demeanour that you display towards me?—think you that I have no feeling, and that I am not disturbed when I see that you are cold and distant——"

"No—not cold and distant," said Ciprina, with some little degree of vehemence; and then immediately resuming the level quiescence of manner she had been before displaying, she added, "I am not cold nor reserved; and rest assured that in no single point will my attentions be less sedulous or my ministrations less constant than they have hitherto been. But henceforth you will behold in me only a nurse to attend upon you, and a guardian to protect you against danger. I now comprehend my true position—you have made me understand it—the lesson was a severe one—but still it was better that my mind should be thus enlightened!"

"Good heavens, Ciprina!" ejaculated Edgar Marcellin, "what do you mean? I do not understand you!"

"You just now suspected," rejoined Ciprina, "that I was capable of administering poison to you!"

"Oh! for a word hastily spoken," ejaculated the invalid, with a true anguish depicted on his countenance, "you would not bear rancour against me!"

"Rancour?—no! heaven forbid!" answered Ciprina. "But that word hastily spoken was as much a sign to me in respect to the current of your thoughts, as the straw which is whirled past may be taken as an indication of the direction of the hurricane. In short, Edgar Marcellin, you have no real confidence in me—you think so little of me that at the very first glimpse of any threatening circumstance your suspicion would fasten itself upon me—and I who have done all that I can to save you, and have risked my own life in your behalf!"

Ciprina had not naturally much strength of mind nor much command over her emotions. She was of too sensuously indolent a disposition—too prone to abandon herself to a voluptuous languor,

to have studied very much how to discipline her feelings. From the instant that she threw her protecting shield over Edgar Marcellin in the picture-gallery, down to the present moment of which we are writing, she had exhibited more presence of mind, more fortitude, more deliberate firmness, and more energy, than ever she had before displayed in all her life. But this moral strength suddenly gave way, and at the close of the speech which we have just recorded, Ciprina burst into tears.

"Ah, my God!" exclaimed Edgar Marcellio, "how brutal is my conduct towards you! I who owe you so much, am acting as if I were indebted to you for nothing! Oh, Ciprina——"

"Do not excite yourself, Edgar," she murmured: and as she sobbed convulsively the heavings of her bosom were visible to the invalid, so that he saw to what extent his tender nurse was affected.

"Nay, but I must obtain your pardon, Ciprina!" said Marcellin. "Oh, for heaven's sake make allowance for my condition at the moment!—enervated and enfeebled—with scarcely the mental power to form a correct judgment——"

"Oh, it is I who have been harsh and unkind!" sobbed Ciprina: "yes, it is I! And it is I therefore, Edgar, who beseech your forgiveness!"

Her head drooped towards his countenance: he covered her lips and her cheeks with kisses—her bare arms were thrown about his neck—and as she pressed his head to her bosom, she murmured, "Oh, not for worlds, Edgar, would I do aught to injure you! I would sooner die than offend you!"

"Dearest, dearest Ciprina," responded Marcellin, "it is bliss to be thus forgiven for the hasty words that have escaped my lips!"—but as he thus spoke, there was a deep though unheard sigh at the bottom of his heart, for he was stricken with remorse as he felt that he was proving perfidious to the image of Coriana Paoli.

"And now, my dear Edgar," said Ciprina, "compose yourself to slumber, if possible; and I shall watch by your side for the remainder of the night. Ah!" she added, glancing at the time-piece on the mantel, "it is a quarter to two o'clock—the morning is advancing!"

Ciprina put on a warm wrapper; and seating herself in an arm-chair by the side of Edgar's couch, she remained there until it was time to give admission to Antonia between seven and eight o'clock in the morning.

The whole of that day passed without any incident worthy of mention. Ciprina sought not the Marchioness—the Marchioness sought not her: and no message was exchanged between them. When evening came, Ciprina said to Antonia, "You will sleep in the ante-chamber tonight. Make up your bed on a sofa against the wainscot-wall on the side of the fire-place. No draught from the door can reach you there."

Antonia obeyed Ciprina's instructions, without for a moment suspecting what her object could be—indeed without fancying that she had any ulterior aim at all—but naturally supposing that it was only that she might be readily within call that she was ordered to occupy that ante-chamber. But this was not the only precaution which Ciprina took. How could she tell but that there

was a secret means of communication with every one of the rooms belonging to her suite? She did not think it probable; but still she was determined to leave nothing to the chapter of accidents. She therefore fastened pieces of silken thread along the walls of the boudoir, her own chamber, and the room occupied by Edgar Marcellin. These threads communicated with another silken string, which Ciprina attached to a bell which she hung over the head of her own bed. Thus it was utterly impossible for any one to enter by a secret door without coming in contact with the silken threads and raising an alarm. The night however passed without any fresh incident to excite apprehension; and Ciprina—who had felt the absolute necessity of taking two or three hours' rest—rose refreshed and invigorated; while Edgar Marcellin was progressing most favourably.

In the course of the forenoon of this same day, which was the third since the night when Edgar Marcellin received his wound, Antonia brought the intelligence to Ciprina that the Marchioness was just setting off for her villa in the Vale of Arno, and that she sent her kind regards to the Signora.

"Is there any message to take back?" inquired Antonia.

Ciprina reflected for a moment; and then she said, "Nothing, beyond the delivery of my own kind regards to her ladyship."

"Do you think that this absence, either real or pretended, from the mansion," inquired Edgar Marcellin, when Ciprina communicated to him what she had just heard,—“do you think that it portends some fresh machination?”

"I know not what to think," answered Ciprina. "Some few days ago, if the Marchioness had gone to her villa, I should have said that it was for some intrigue of gallantry: but now everything is changed, and every incident must be viewed with suspicion. We will be upon our guard. Open violence I do not for a moment apprehend: we are like two hostile camps watching each other from a distance. As for any now attempt by the insidious means of poison, I scarcely think that Lucrezia will have recourse thereto. But again I say we shall be upon our guard—and moreover we have the antidote!"

But here we must take leave of Ciprina and Edgar Marcellin for the present, and we must follow the Marchioness di Mirano to her beautiful villa, distant some few miles from Florence. Thither the reader has been introduced on a former occasion; and therefore we shall not be compelled to interrupt the course of our narrative for the sake of much description. We will at once proceed to observe that when the evening came, Lucrezia di Mirano attired herself in the most elegant costume, and proceeded to that suite of beautifully furnished apartments which some months back she lent to Ciprina, and whither Edgar Marcellin was introduced to the arms of that young lady by the machinations of the unfortunate Giulio.

The particular apartment in which the Marchioness of Mirano now took her seat to await the arrival of some one whom she expected, was brilliantly lighted by lamps held in the hands of exquisitely chiselled alabaster statues. These statues, though such beautiful specimens of the



art were nevertheless of a voluptuousness corresponding with the character of the mistress of that villa and the luxurious appointments of the room itself. Yet not for a moment must it be supposed that there was anything gross or indecent in respect either to the statues or pictures that might be seen there. Nothing of the sort. Those statues and pictures, if beheld separately and individually, in any other mansion, casino, or villa, would not have produced the least impression of sensuousness, so exquisitely refined was the subject of each; but it was the general effect of the grouping and assembling in one room of all these works of art which was calculated to leave a certain effect upon the mind. The table in that apartment was spread with a dessert of the choicest wines and the most luxurious fruits,—the former being the produce of the richest and the rarest vintages, the latter emanating from the well-kept hothouses in Lucrezia's own gardens. On one

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side of the room there was a purple velvet curtain suspended to a rod by means of massive gilt rings; and if this curtain was drawn aside, it would disclose a bed-chamber as exquisitely appointed as the apartment to which we have been alluding.

The reader will recollect that on the night of the entertainment at the Mirano mansion in Florence, the Marchioness had said to the Count of Ramorino, Minister of Police: "On the third day hence I shall be alone at my villa in the Vale of Arno! *alone*, do you understand me?—and thither may you come!" This was the evening of the third day; and Lucrezia di Mirano was therefore awaiting the arrival of the nobleman to whom she had given the appointment.

But was the Marchioness happy! was she prepared to enjoy the entertainment which was provided,—those fruits and those wines?—or to revel with unalloyed rapture in amatory pleasures? No!—though she was tutoring her countenance to

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receive the Count of Ramorino with smiles, there was a perfect hell in her heart. A thousand times in the course of that day and the preceding one had she asked herself how it was possible that Edgar Marcellin and Ciprina could have escaped the effects of the poison? She knew—or at least she had been well assured by La Dolcina, of whom she had purchased it, that it was speedy in its operation, and inevitable in its effects: she had poured some drops into every decanter, glass, and jug containing liquids in the chambers which she had stealthily visited—and could it be supposed that by some strange accident none of those beverages had been touched by the lips of the intended victims? This indeed was the only solution of the mystery on which the Marchioness could at all settle her mind—the only reasonable conjecture which her imagination could conjure up. And yet there was a certain vague, uneasy idea floating in her mind, that this was *not* the veritable explanation of the affair—but that something else lay behind the veil which she could neither lift with her hand nor penetrate with her eyes. But during these two whole days she had not sought to procure other poison—she had not visited La Dolcina to seek an explanation, if possible, of the mystery:—she had waited and waited in the last faint hope that some decanter or jug the contents of which might not have been thrown away or changed, would yet produce the desired effect. But no! Down to the moment when the Marchioness left her town-mansion to pay this present visit to her villa in the Vale of Arno, that hope remained unfulfilled—Edgar Marcellin and Ciprina both lived!

Without entering for the present into a deeper analysis of Lucrezia di Mirano's thoughts, speculations and fears, we may presume that the reader can have no possible difficulty in comprehending how unsettled was her mind, and how perplexed she was to conceive in what manner all her embarrassments would end. At length the Count di Ramorino, Minister of Police, was announced; and then all in a moment the spirits of the Marchioness rose—she felt as if she were under the influence of a powerful protection; and that with a friend to screen her from all difficulty and protect her from all enemies, she might defy everything and everybody.

The Count had long been enamoured of the Marchioness of Mirano—he had long striven to obtain her favours; his passion had been excited by the very obstacles its gratification had encountered—his desires had derived an additional zest from the same cause. And now the hour of his success and triumph had arrived—the moment of his happiness was at hand! Never had he seen Lucrezia di Mirano to greater advantage—never in his eyes had she appeared more ravishingly handsome! All uneasiness—all traces of sinister passions had vanished from her countenance: her looks were full of love and tenderness and voluptuous languor. The Count of Ramorino folded her again and again in his arms—he fastened his lips to hers—and while bestowing the most passionate kisses, he received the most deliciously voluptuous ones in return.

They sat down together at the table: Lucrezia poured out wine; and every gesture, every movement which she made, gave new effect to the

charms of her person,—now riveting the attention of the Count upon the lovely white hand, with the long tapering fingers, and the almond-shaped nails with their natural pinkness far more pellucid and beautiful than the henna-tinted nails of oriental beauties,—then displaying the well-rounded and symmetrically shaped arm, bare almost to the shoulder,—or else affording a still more complete view of the gorgeous treasures of the bust than the low-bodied dress was wont to disclose! And then too, as Lucrezia proffered to the Count the glass which she had filled, she bent upon him those blue eyes which seemed to swim in a soft sensuous languor—and she smiled too with a sensuous significance and a sly mischievousness which revealed the ivory whiteness of the teeth. Altogether the amorous Count had every reason to be charmed, fascinated, and enraptured with her in whose society he thus found himself, seated at that table covered with all delicacies, and in that exquisitely furnished apartment where the atmosphere was warm and perfumed.

"Let me not omit to thank you, my dear Count," said the Marchioness, in the course of conversation, "for the promptitude with which you attended to my request in reference to that dangerous Neapolitan——"

"Oh, I beseech you, dearest Lucrezia," interrupted the Minister of Police, "not to take the trouble of expressing a syllable of thanks on account of such a trifle! The fellow was turned out of Florence at an early hour of the morning of the day before yesterday; and some of my most zealous officers saw him on the high road to Lucca,—at the same time giving him the strictest injunctions not to be again found in the Tuscan territories on pain of the severest punishment."

"And if he were to disobey your orders?" inquired the Marchioness.

"Ah! at his peril he will do it!" ejaculated the Count. "My *sbirri* failed not to threaten him with eternal immurement in some fortress amongst the Appenines—at Barberino or Bagno——"

"Oh, how sweet it must be to exercise such power!" said the Marchioness, with a certain degree of emphasis, though in a low tone—for she was rather musing to herself than intending to speak to be overheard by her companion.

"It is sweet to possess power," replied the Count, "in order that it may be exercised on behalf of those whom one loves. Ah, dearest Lucrezia! if there were ever a moment when I felt that it was really worth while to undertake the cares of office for the sake of enjoying whatsoever advantages the position affords, it was when issuing the mandates that were dictated by your wishes! And as I observed to you the other evening, it would afford me infinite delight to have an opportunity of proving my devotion in some manner far more important than this comparatively trivial and insignificant affair in which my services have just been rendered available."

"You are all kindness and all generosity," said the Marchioness, bestowing of her own accord a tender caress upon her companion.

"And you, Lucrezia," murmured the Count, in a voice that was half stifled by the ecstatic emotions which he experienced,—“Oh! you are gloriously handsome! I would do anything for you!

Yes—you know not how I love you! I feel, Lucrezia, that I shall be unhappy and discontented—”

“You unhappy and discontented?” she ejaculated, surveying the Count with an air of surprise blended with a show of tenderest anxiety.

“Yes—until I can do something to prove how ardently I love you—to show how grateful I am for the happiness which you are now conferring upon me—in a word, to convince you that I hold myself to be your slave! Ah, the idea that you should be molested by any wretched Neapolitan refugee! Why, if you possessed enemies the greatest and most powerful in the land, I would find means to sweep them all from the face of the earth!”

“Ah, my dear Count,” said the Marchioness, at the same time bestowing another caress: “you are very kind: but—”

“But what, Lucrezia?” interjected Ramorino. “Do you doubt my power?—for I am sure that you cannot suspect the sincerity of my inclination to do all I have promised if at any time you should put me to the test?”

“No, no, dear Count—I do not suspect your inclination! heaven forbid! after all the assurances you have given me! But your power—is it indeed so very great?”

“Greater than that of the Grand Duke himself,” responded Ramorino, a certain look of pride now mingling with the gaze of brimful passion which he was fixing upon the upturned countenance of the Marchioness: “yes, greater than that of the Sovereign himself! I will tell you why. If the Grand Duke sought to plunge an enemy into a dungeon, he must procure my counter-signature to the warrant; and that counter-signature would not be given without sufficient reasons. But on the other hand, if I sought to immure a foe in a fortalice till the end of his days—to wall him up as it were in a living tomb—I have but to present the warrant to his Highness and demand his assent, without the necessity of affording a single syllable of explanation.”

“Oh, then, the power you wield is indeed great!” murmured the Marchioness, now appearing to gaze with mingled pride and fondness upon the countenance of the Minister. “It is sweet to have you as a friend: it would be terrible to have you as an enemy!”

“And remember well, Lucrezia,” rejoined the Count, “that whatsoever terror there may be in the power which I wield, shall be felt by *your* enemies!”

“Ah! if I dared!” ejaculated the Marchioness—“Oh, if I dared!”—and then she stopped short.

“What mean you?” inquired the Count hastily. “There is something in your mind? Oh, if I could render you a service—”

“Did you not say,” inquired Lucrezia, evidently reflecting deeply with an under-current of thought, at the same time that she put the question,—“did you not say that you had the power—the fearful power—of immuring a foe in a dungeon—walling him up in a living tomb—”

“Yes, all that power,” responded the Count of Ramorino. “You have read history, my dear Lucrezia—you know what the Bastille of former times was in Paris,—how men were plunged into its silent depths, and as much lost to the world

as if sunk a thousand fathoms below the surface of the sea—how every voice which might give vent to an accusation against any great one at the time, was there stifled—how every tongue which threatened to proclaim truths that were unpleasant to the Court or its favourites, was there gagged—”

“Yes, yes,” said Lucrezia,—“I have read of all this. But what has that to do, my dear Count, with the circumstances of the present day—and those circumstances applying themselves to Tuscany?”

“It means, dearest Lucrezia,—it means,” repeated Ramorino, with a smile that was peculiar and sinister in its significance,—“it means that Tuscany has its Bastilles which yawn to receive the enemies of the Court or of the high dignitaries of the State. And when I add, Lucrezia, that if you happen to possess enemies, they become my enemies also—you know what I mean!”

“Ah, this is indeed a strong proof of love which you are giving me!” exclaimed the Marchioness, winding her warm white arms about the Minister’s neck and covering his cheeks with kisses. “But do you mean me to understand that prisoners who are carried off in this manner, remain altogether lost to the world, and that the world is lost to them—that henceforth no communication can take place—”

“Between them and the world? No—none!” replied Ramorino. “It is a species of death—with this difference, that the aid of the headsman or the hangman has not been called in.”

“Still I scarcely understand you,” said the Marchioness. “Suppose now for instance that I had an enemy—or let us say a couple of enemies—”

“Well,” interjected the Count; “and let us suppose that these two enemies had obtained possession of some secret which threatened the loss of your reputation—or your fortune—or your liberty—or your life—”

“Well, well,” said the Marchioness hastily; “let us suppose something of this sort,—of course I should be glad to silence such enemies for ever—”

“Naturally so,” interrupted the Count,—“while you would not precisely like to go to such a length as to take their lives. And then too, *disappearance and murder* are very different! The former leaves naught behind to tell a tale, but at once involves everything in a stupendous and awful mystery; whereas, on the other hand, the latter leaves its bloodmarks and its sanguineous traces—”

“True! true!” said the Marchioness, with a strong inward excitement—though as her form quivered to the pressure of the Count’s arms, he fancied that it was palpitating with a softer and more sensuous passion. “And this disappearance means immurement in a dungeon?”

“It means incarceration in a fortress,” rejoined the Minister, “the walls of which are so thick that they beat back every sound from within and intercept every sound from without,—a fortress where the gaolers and the sentinels have no ears and no eyes for aught beyond the orders which they receive from their superiors—where hopes dies upon the threshold the instant it is crossed by the foot of the in-going captive—and whence there is no out-coming so long as the cause for which

the immurement took place may continue to exist!"

"And it is by such means," said the Marchioness, quivering more and more with the agitation of a ferocious inward joy and with the excitement of a fierce triumph,—*"it is by such means that you would dispose of your enemies?"*

"Aye—and that I have disposed of them," rejoined Ramorino, with a sinister chuckle. "They have been heard of no more—and though in reality they continue to live, breathe, feel, and think, yet are they dead to the world, while the world itself is the same as if it were dead to them—and at all events they are utterly powerless to do me a mischief."

"Oh, I love you, Count—yes, I love you more and more," cried the Marchioness, as if in a voice of exultation, "because you possess so glorious a spirit. Ah, if I had this power——"

"Have you enemies, dearest Lucrezia?" inquired Ramorino, straining her luxurious form more closely with one arm, while with the other hand he raised the red wine to his lips.

"Have I enemies?" she said, as if not exactly comprehending his query—or at least as if for a moment hesitating how to answer it. "Alas, yes!—enemies who threaten me with exposure!—enemies who demand that I shall surrender up the great bulk of my wealth in order that my reputation may be spared from being dragged into the mire of infamy!"

"Ah, this is abominable!" exclaimed Ramorino, a fierce light flashing from his black eyes. "But if you have these enemies, Lucrezia, you have also the power to punish them——"

"If?" she ejaculated, as if with a sudden start.

"To be sure! Have I not told you that whatsoever power I wield, is the same as if you yourself wielded it likewise?"

"Oh, yes! I remember you said all this!" exclaimed the Marchioness. "A thousand, thousand thanks!"—and she lavished upon him almost as many kisses as she was bestowing thanks.

"Did you doubt my power or my willingness to serve you in this matter, Lucrezia?" asked the Count. "But no, no! you could not! And now these enemies of yours——"

"You know the Signora Ciprina?"

"Of course!—she lives with you. Have I not seen her often and often? But you do not for a moment mean me to understand——"

"Alas, alas!" murmured Lucrezia, now speaking in a broken voice; "I mean you to understand everything that is bad, and vile, and deceitful, and wicked, in reference to that false ungrateful creature!"

"Just heaven! is this possible?" exclaimed Ramorino, with perfect amazement depicted on his countenance. "I thought you were the best of friends—that you were like sisters—that the Signora Ciprina was devoted to you—that you on your side were devoted to her——"

"And until with the last few days," interjected the Marchioness, "I have been to her as a devoted sister—though now, when too late, I find that it is a serpent whom I have been cherishing to sting me!"

"You surprise me!—nay, more, you afflict me!" said the Minister of Police. "I thought you were so happy together——"

"And so we were until lately," rejoined the Marchioness: "or rather, I should observe, it was I who felt happy in the delusion wherein I was cradled, to the effect that I had a sincere friend—aye, a veritable sister in Ciprina. But it is all otherwise!"

"How did this happen? what has she done? what is she doing?" inquired the Count.

"Alas, my dearest friend," responded Lucrezia, bending down her face upon his breast, "you know that my life has not been altogether pure and immaculate——"

"You have enjoyed life—you are enjoying it!" interjected the Count. "And why should you not? Young and beautiful as you are—rich, accomplished, and elegant—courted by everybody——"

"Ah, well! it is kind of you," interrupted the Marchioness, "to find excuses for my frailties. But Oh! for the future you only shall I love—you only shall receive my favours!"—and she again lavished caresses upon him. "And now picture to yourself the perfidy of that infamous Ciprina!—insinuating herself into my confidence—gaining a knowledge of all my secrets—sharing in my pleasures—and then—and then——Oh, it is enough to break my heart!"—and the Marchioness now sobbed with a violence which was so admirably assumed that it completely deceived the Minister of Police, though of all men in the world he was the least likely to be duped by any such outward show.

"I begin to understand, my poor Lucrezia," he said. "This Ciprina of yours is, after all, some adventuress, no doubt?"

"Alas, yes—it must be so!" exclaimed the Marchioness, now affecting a fierce indignation. "Would you believe it—she who threatens to expose me, is by her own conduct outraging all decencies? She has got her paramour—some worthless Frenchman—an escaped galley-slave, I believe——"

"Ah, by Jupiter! this grows more and more serious!" said the Minister of Police. "Why did you not tell me everything at first? But go on, go on! Let me know all—and then we will decide upon the mode of action. She has got her paramour, you said——"

"Yes—the wretch! She has got her paramour—this cut-throat ruffian of a Frenchman—living with her in my house—occupying her suite of apartments beneath my roof—to the utter scandal and degradation of—of——"

"It is intolerable!" exclaimed Ramorino: "it is not to be borne! And this vile couple together dare to menace you?"

"Yes—with complete exposure, unless I surrender them up more than half my fortune. The shameless prodigals! they care not for exposing themselves at the same time——"

"Enough, Lucrezia!" interrupted Ramorino: "you have told me sufficient to make me sympathize with you, my sweet friend, and also to afford me the opportunity which I so much desired of rendering you some service that should signally and unmistakably prove my devotion. Within four-and-twenty hours you shall be freed from the terrorism which those wretches have exercised over you!"

"Ah, then, gratitude now commingles with the

sincerest and most devoted love!" exclaimed the Marchioness, again lavishing the tenderest and most voluptuous caresses upon the Minister. "But remember—this must be accomplished without noise or disturbance——"

"With the utmost silence, and in the dead of night," interjected Ramorino. "There are gags for tongues as well as chains for limbs!"

"Yes, yes," said the Marchioness, agitated with a feverish joy, mingling with a certain apprehension lest everything should fail at the very moment when success seemed to be promised: "there must indeed be silence on the part of those wretches—for if they were allowed to raise their voices in the presence of your guards and *sbirri*, they might tell tales which, alas! I should blush to have repeated——"

"Fear naught upon this head," interrupted Ramorino. "If my men find no easier means of silencing the tongues of those wretches, a more effectual method shall be tried:"—the Count paused for a few moments; then looking steadily at the Marchioness, he added, "Their brains shall be blown out."

"My friend! my benefactor! my lover! my beloved!" cried the Marchioness, in accents of enthusiasm. "Oh, I do indeed love you! But when——"

"To-morrow night," responded Ramorino. "I will give the requisite orders to the most trustworthy and discreet of my followers; and you, dearest Lucrezia, must indicate the best mode by which the transaction is to be carried out——"

"Let me not seem to be a party to it!" interrupted the Marchioness; "or else the domestics will wonder—they will think that Ciprina had got deep into certain secrets which I did not choose to have known——"

"Can you not give to the affair such a complexion," asked the Count of Ramorino, "that it may seem as if Ciprina and her paramour had fled of their own accord? For rest assured, dearest Lucrezia, that if you only indicate the means of ingress and egress with regard to your mansion—the means, I would say, which are the most secret and private—I will undertake that the *sbirri* shall do their duty so well, that not an unusual sound shall ruffle the slumber of even the very lightest sleeper beneath your roof."

"The means are easy," responded the Marchioness. "Look, my dear Count," she continued, indicating the figured carpet with the point of her exquisitely-shaped foot, and by the movement displaying the ankle up to the very swell of the leg,—"suppose that this portion of the pattern represents the inner stable-yard of my town-mansion——"

"The stable-yard where your own beautiful steed is kept?" said the Count. "To be sure! I have seen it there—have I not?"

"Yes—you have seen it there," continued the Marchioness. "But perhaps you may not have noticed——indeed it can scarcely be probable—that on one side of this stable-yard there is a little low door, deeply set in the solid masonry——"

"I have noticed that door," interrupted the Count of Ramorino, with a peculiar smile; "and I can now conjecture the nature of the statement you are about to make, and which corroborates a

certain written tradition preserved amongst the archives of my department of the Government."

"Indeed?" ejaculated the Marchioness, with a look of the most unfeigned surprise. "A written tradition?"

"Yes," rejoined Ramorino,—"a tradition of the existence of some secret passage in the Mirano mansion: but there is a note appended to the entry in the police-books, to the effect that it remains a matter of doubt whether the Marquis of Mirano, your deceased husband, preserved that secret passage when renovating his palatial dwelling—or whether he condemned it altogether. I may here parenthetically observe, my dear Lucrezia, that if I had been Minister of Police at the time when those repairs and improvements were in progress, I should have made it my business to ascertain the point I have just represented as having hitherto remained doubtful,—because it is my idea that a Minister of Police ought to be acquainted with everything."

"And how would you have ascertained such a point, my dear Count?" inquired the Marchioness, with a smile, which however veiled a certain degree of unassiveness, even in respect to her new lover: for shrewd and penetrating though she had hitherto known him to be, she could not help now fancying—and almost *fearing*—that he was more cunning in that shrewdness and more keen in that penetration than she had even anticipated; so that perhaps her own dark secrets and sinister purposes might not remain for ever concealed from his knowledge.

"How could I have ascertained the point?" repeated Ramorino, almost with a transitory smile of pity for her ignorance, until the sensation was in a moment absorbed in the long and impassioned caress which he bestowed upon her ere he went on speaking; for that woman exhaled as it were the very perfume of voluptuousness, so that the brain, usually so clear, of the Minister of Police was more than half intoxicated in his delicious contact with her form. "Were there not bricklayers, and masons, and carpenters who could have been questioned?"

"There were only two bricklayers and two carpenters," interjected the Marchioness, "who were especially engaged in the renovation of those parts of the building wherewith the secret is connected; and they worked at night-time, unknown to their comrades."

"If there had been only one," rejoined the Minister, "I would have extracted the secret from him!"

"But suppose that he was well paid for his secrecy?"

"There are grades and degrees in all things: one bribe is heavier than another; and the heaviest bribe carries the day."

"But what if the workman," continued the Marchioness, "had been sent off to some distant part of the country—or into another State—the moment his labour was accomplished?"

"He would have been intercepted on his departure from Florence," rejoined Ramorino, with a smile, which was this time of a complacent self-sufficiency: "and his secret would have been obtained from him. Believe me, my dear Lucrezia, whatever I desire to know I will assuredly penetrate and fathom; and if there be now and then

certain matters which remain wrapped up in mystery—say, for argument's sake, the assassination of that young page of yours some months ago—they only continue unravelled because they are of too little importance to induce me to waste my own time or the funds of my department upon them."

It was with a growing uneasiness that Lucrezia listened to this speech, as she half reclined in the arms of the Minister, who still had one arm clamping her waist. For an instant she darted a quick look up into his countenance, to ascertain if that allusion to the death of Giulio had anything pointed in it, or if it were a mere random observation: but there was naught in the expression of the Count's features to justify the apprehension. Nevertheless, Lucrezia felt from this moment a vague sense—a sort of conscience-stricken idea—that she was, or at least might be, more in the power of that man than she had hitherto anticipated.

"And now, my dearest," resumed the Minister, "let us revert to the subject from which we have wandered away. The secret passage still exists and the entrance is where you have described it. Whither does it lead?"

"The secret passage communicates direct," returned Lucrezia, "with the suite of apartments occupied by Ciprina and her vile paramour. The door at the extremity is set in the wainscot of that room; and it opens *inward*—I mean that it opens into the passage itself; so that if any piece of furniture be standing against it inside the apartment, it can afford no opposition to the opening of the door and no permanent barrier to the entrance of any one. There is a secret spring, which on the inner side is communicated with by means of a brass knob; while on the other side—namely, that of the room itself—its precise position may be ascertained by reckoning the teeth from the bottom of the middle row of gilt nails which embellish the panelling of the wainscot."

"All this I bear in mind," observed the Minister, "as completely as if I had known the secret as long as yourself. But now arises another point. My *shirri*, whom I shall trust with the enterprise, may be enabled to distinguish Ciprina, because I shall afford them an accurate description of your treacherous lady-friend. But how are they to recognize this paramour of her's?—for, as you may understand, I am supposing that by some accident the vile couple may have visitors. You had better give me a minute description of the paramour."

"It is unnecessary," replied the Marchioness, who, for several reasons, did not wish to excite the suspicion that the individual was Edgar Marcellin, for fear lest Ramorino should become mistrustful on account of all these complications. "Believe me, it is altogether unnecessary! Ciprina and her paramour will be alone together. Of this there is no doubt."

"At least," interjected Ramorino, "you had better tell me the man's name."

"Ah, his name!" said Lucrezia. "Let me see? I have seen so little of him—I held him in such abhorrence—But ah! I recollect! It is Bourdon. At least I think Ciprina so called him—But doubtless he has a dozen different names to suit his various purposes."

"Then the long and short of it is," said

Ramorino, "I had better not trouble myself with any names or personal descriptions at all. If you are sure that there will be only the two birds in the cage at the time, and those the right ones, I will issue my orders accordingly."

"Nay—I do not affirm that there will be *only* the two birds," rejoined Lucrezia, "because Ciprina might possibly have her favourite handmaiden Antonia with her on the occasion. Therefore you must be sure, my dear Count, to give your men the description of Ciprina."

"I comprehend," ejaculated Ramorino. "The order shall be to this effect—to *arrest the Signora Ciprina, and any man who at the time may be found in her company.*"

"Precisely so," responded the Marchioness, her heart leaping with joy at the decision which had thus been arrived at, and at the prospect of beholding Ciprina and Edgar Marcellin immured in a fortress for the remainder of their days.

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER VISIT TO LA DOLFINA.

WE must return to the very persons whose names we have mentioned at the conclusion of the preceding chapter. The reader has seen that when Antonia announced to them the intention of the Marchioness to proceed to her villa in the Vale of Arno, Edgar Marcellin was at once smitten with the suspicion that some new treachery was designed. He longed to get beyond the walls of that house of peril: he was perfectly convinced that Ciprina was dealing most faithfully as well as most kindly with him; but he dreaded lest she herself should be overreached or rendered powerless by the intrigues and machinations of the detestable woman. Yet he still felt too weak to leave the apartment where he was being so tenderly ministered unto: he felt likewise that the instant when he should go forth from the Mirano mansion, he must adopt some prompt and decisive course—and he could not be blind to the fact that he was deficient in energy, alike physical and mental, for such a proceeding. Thus, as the hours passed onward during the day whereof we are writing—namely, that on which the Marchioness went to her villa—he grew feverish and excited. Hitherto he had been progressing favourably: indeed on the morning of this day he had risen from his bed—he had put on a dressing-gown—and for change of air and scene he had removed into the boudoir, or elegant sitting apartment belonging to the suite. Ciprina beheld with increasing pain and anxiety, as those hours elapsed, that Edgar was chafing at his confinement—that he was irritating and exciting himself. She knew that this was natural enough, under existing circumstances: but it was not the less to be deplored—and, if possible, must be prevented. As the reader may easily imagine, she said all kinds of things with the object of consoling—she redoubled, if possible, her assiduities—her attentions grew more tender and delicate. Once—and once only—she ventured to inquire what his future plans might be—thereby alluding to the Marchioness: but she saw that the topic

was a painful one, and she did not therefore persist in it.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening; and Edgar, reclining upon a couch, gradually sank off into slumber. Ciprina bent over him, gazing with intense anxiety on his pale handsome countenance: and there was now nothing sensuous in the regards of the young lady. If she were the invalid's sister, her thoughts could not have been more chaste, nor her attentions more completely fraught with a delicate disinterestedness. She perceived that his sleep soon became uneasy—his breathing was difficult: she fancied that he was either under the influence of a troubled dream, or that he was suffering under the pain of his wound. The longer she watched the more alarmed she grew,—until at length she resolved to pay another visit to La Dolcina and procure a fresh potion. But should she in the meanwhile leave him alone—or in the care of Antonia? She knew not precisely how to act; and while she was still deliberating with herself, Marcellin awoke with a sudden start from his uneasy slumber. Ciprina threw her arms about his neck, and exclaimed what she had been revolving in her mind. Edgar did indeed feel so feverish and uneasy that he grew alarmed on his own account; so that it was by no means a difficult task for Ciprina to persuade him of the necessity for her to pay the contemplated visit to the wise woman. He knew that the potion which she had in the first instance procured for him had done him good—that the balsam applied to his wound had hitherto shed a healing influence—and that the antidote had proved efficient against the poison used by the Marchioness. So far, therefore, from entertaining any fear in respect to La Dolcina's skill or Ciprina's fidelity, the invalid had the fullest confidence in both.

Edgar retired to his chamber: Antonia was summoned to wait in the ante-room, in case he should want anything; and Ciprina, muffling herself in a cloak and covering her countenance with a thick veil, issued forth from the Mirano mansion.

The house of La Dolcina was soon reached, for the young lady glided quickly through the streets: she pulled the iron chain which hung at the doorpost; and in a few moments the shrivelled mummy-like woman made her appearance. Ciprina at once crossed the threshold; and before she had removed her veil, she found herself recognised; for the hag said, "What news, signora? Is the young gentleman better?"

"He is better—but he is not well," she replied; "and that is the reason I have sought you again."

"No," said the woman; "it is not likely he would yet be well if the wound were in the first instance so serious as to induce you to visit me at all. It was four nights ago that you came to me—and the interval has been too short for such recovery."

She conducted Ciprina up into the apartment where the skeleton presented its ghastly aspect—and where the crocodile, the human bones, the infant-monsters in glass bottles, the table covered with black cloth, and the other accessories of the woman's art or avocation, whichever we may denominate it, were in precisely the same position as on the previous occasion of the young lady's visit.

Ciprina threw back her veil—partly because she had heated herself by running through the streets, for the weather was warm though it was the last day of October,—and partly because she did not deem it prudent to maintain any reserve with the woman whose succour she had come to seek. La Dolcina gazed upon her with attention, and said, "Tell me exactly how it now fares with the young gentleman?"

"Until to-day he progressed favourably, and even rapidly," responded Ciprina: "but for the last few hours he has been restless and uneasy—he slept in a troubled manner——"

"There has been something to annoy him?" said the woman, putting the question with the emphasis of one who already foresaw the answer.

"Yes," said Ciprina. "But I cannot tell you what it is."

"You know, however?" said the woman. "Yes—I see that you do. I am not asking for curiosity's sake—only that I may judge how to act. Tell me therefore, has the cause of annoyance passed?"

"The particular cause of annoyance has passed," was the rejoinder: "but my patient naturally chafes at being confined to the sick chamber——"

"What?" ejaculated La Dolcina, with a leering smile: "even when he is ministered unto by so beautiful a nurse? But I see that you are in a hurry, and I will do my best for you. Ah! by the bye, do you happen to require any more of my sovereign antidotes?"

Ciprina looked hard at the woman—but her countenance was inscrutable; so that it was impossible for the young lady to tell whether she had spoken with a special purpose, or whether she were merely endeavouring to dispose of as many of her commodities as she might.

"You may give me another phial of your antidote," said Ciprina. "Who can tell how useful it may sooner or later become? Ah!" she ejaculated, as a sudden thought struck her, "those who prepare antidotes doubtless deal in the poisons likewise?"

"Am I to understand," inquired the woman, fixing her eyes keenly upon the young lady, "that you are in want of poison?—for it would be singular indeed if the same hand which administers healing medicines, should likewise deal with venomous draughts."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Ciprina, with a shuddering look so real that the dame at once felt convinced of her sincerity.

"Then you had some motive for asking the question," said La Dolcina.

"No," replied the young lady, assuming an air of careless indifference.

"But I feel convinced that you had!" at once rejoined the woman. "Now, if you wish me to deal candidly with you, you must in the first instance act frankly towards me. Tell me why you put the question, and I shall be enabled to judge how I may shape my own answer."

"Which means," said Ciprina, with a smile, "that if I reiterate the assurance that I have no particular motive, you will at once assure me that you never deal in poisons: whereas if on the other hand I tell you that I have a particular motive and if I explain it, you will make a contrary avowal. Now, the evident deduction

is that you *do* deal in poisons: and I will therefore at once ask you whether you have not very recently disposed of some to a certain noble lady who lives in grand style at no great distance hence?"

While thus speaking, Ciprina opened her purse and drew forth several pieces of gold, as a hint that if the dame treated her with candour she would be well rewarded.

"Tell me who you are," said the woman; "for I begin to suspect—or rather I will proclaim it at once! You are the Signora Ciprina—and you live at the Mirano mansion!"

"Though a bumble individual," replied the young lady, with a smile, "I am yet known to several persons—and why not to La Dolfina amongst them? It requires no witch—"

"I take heaven to witness," exclaimed the woman, "that I did not know you until the moment when I proclaimed my suspicion and then affirmed it as a certainty."

"You might have seen that I was more or less indifferent as to whether you recognised me or not," answered Ciprina, "even on the first occasion when I visited you; for I raised my veil then as I have done now. But supposing what you state to be true, how came you to suspect all of a sudden, and without any hint from my lips, that I am the Signora Ciprina?"

"Because I have for some time known that a young lady of exceeding beauty, and belonging to some foreign country, is living with the Marchioness of Mirano. You are of exceeding beauty—you have dark hair and eyes; and thus far you correspond with the description that in mere conversational moments has on occasions met my ears in reference to the Signora Ciprina. Then again, you belong to some foreign country—for you speak the Italian tongue with an accent, though with a delicious melodiousness of voice."

"Nay—but all these circumstances," said Ciprina, again smiling with sly significance, "are much too vague and indefinite to convince you so suddenly that I am the very identical Ciprina of whom you have heard speak. Now, my good woman, let us understand each other," she continued, at once becoming serious. "It was because I inquired in reference to the proceedings of a certain noble lady whom you at once knew to be the Marchioness di Mirano that I meant,—it was on *this* account, I say, that you were struck with the suspicion that I might be that lady's friend; and then the other little circumstances you have mentioned—the good looks, the black eyes and hair, and the foreign accent—served as corroboratives of the idea. Is it not so?"

La Dolfina looked at the young lady for a few moments; and then with a laugh she said, "You are more shrewd and cunning than I could possibly have suspected. Well, my dear signora, we are going to deal candidly with each other; and I will admit the truth. Yes—you are right: the suspicion was engendered in my mind in the way you have mentioned."

"And I am right also," said Ciprina, placing ten pieces of gold in the wise-woman's hand, "in the belief that you have sold poison to the Marchioness of Mirano?"

"Is the secret to remain between you and me?" asked La Dolfina.

"Yes: and the best proof is that I owe you the deepest debt of gratitude," rejoined the young lady; "for if it had not been for your antidote, I should be a stiff cold corpse now!"

"And if it had not been," rejoined La Dolfina, "that I suspected you had by some means or another found it needful to use the antidote, by the fact of your asking for a second phial, I should not have suffered myself to be drawn into these revealings. And so it was for you, beautiful creature," continued the woman, gazing with a look of sympathy on Ciprina, "that the poison was bought?"

"Yes—it was for me. But tell me frankly, had you any particular motive in recommending me the other night to purchase your antidote?"

"Yes—three distinct motives," answered La Dolfina. "First, that I might make you as good a customer as possible: second, because it is my invariable habit to recommend antidotes against poison, so that in case I should at any time become involved in entanglements with the police, I may secure to myself a repute quite contrary to that of a poison-vender; and third, because there was something about you which inspired me with a real interest, so that I was anxious to render you a service, if possible—for I surmised, from the adventure of the wounded young gentleman, that you were at least entering, if not already plunging deep into the gallantries of this city—and I knew that in this case, the greater the number of defensive weapons with which you were armed, the better it would be for you."

There was something in the woman's look which made Ciprina think she was speaking with sincerity when she thus proclaimed a sympathetic feeling on her behalf; but as she was not completely sure, she made no remark on the point.

"It seems to me singular," said the young lady, "that the Marchioness of Mirano should have taken such little precaution in purchasing the poison of you, as to suffer you to know who she was."

"Ah, there you are wrong, signora!" returned La Dolfina: "her ladyship's proceeding was not deficient in precaution. She strove all she could to conceal herself from my recognition: she retained a veil thickly folded over her countenance—and I asked her not to move it. Nor did I recognise her at the time. But I caused her to be followed: she was traced back to the Mirano mansion—and then, by her stature, by her gait, and by a curl of golden auburn hair which had escaped from beneath the veil while she was in my presence, I felt assured she could be none other than Lucrezia di Mirano herself."

"And why did you cause her to be followed?" asked Ciprina.

"Since we are engaged in mutual dealings of frankness," rejoined the wise-woman, "I will answer your question. It is my business to know everything—or at least to seem to know everything. But how could this knowledge be acquired unless by a variety of artifices and manoeuvres? Half the ladies in Florence have been to me at different times for various purposes; and they all flatter themselves that I am in ignorance of the personal identities of those who thus visit me. But they are mistaken."



AGNES.

"And why did you not cause me to be followed the other night when I came to you?" asked Ciprina.

"It was a simple but yet a rare accident which prevented it," replied the woman. "The female spy whom I usually employ for night-watchings, had been seized with illness of a dangerous character; and while on the one hand she herself could not glide into the streets in pursuit of you, I on the other hand dared not leave my patient for that purpose. Otherwise I should have known who you were on that very same night."

"And now," said Ciprina, "will you have the kindness to tell me why you are thus frank and explicit with me? You are laying bare, as it were, the secrets and mysteries of your own art—you are putting aside the mask from your countenance—and if ever you aspired to be a conjuror, a witch, or a reader of the future, you are now

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doing all you can to prove to me that you are naught but a common mortal after all. Why this frankness?"

"I can only repeat what I have just now said," answered La Dolina,—"that from the very first moment I experienced a feeling of sympathy in your behalf. You treated me with kindness and consideration—you threw back your veil with an easy graceful confidence, as if you felt that it was a proper act of courtesy to reveal your countenance to one of whom you were seeking succour. You gave me your gold with a charming affability—and there was a deep gratitude in your looks as you took the potion and the balsam. Ah! perhaps you think that mine is a heart so indurated by every selfish feeling that it cannot be touched by gentleness of behaviour on the part of those with whom I come in contact? But you are wrong—and the proof of it may be seen in the

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confidence with which I have treated you. Besides, I know that I may trust you—there is something in your looks—in your words——”

“Yes, you may trust me!” exclaimed Ciprina. “And now——”

“One word more,” proceeded the wise-woman. “You told me that you owed me your life—that the antidote I furnished saved you from the effects of the Marchioness of Mirano’s poison——”

“Ah! did I say that it was the Marchioness?” cried Ciprina.

“You did not say it,” rejoined La Dolcina; “but I had no difficulty in forming the conjecture after the turn which the conversation took relative to her ladyship. Doubtless there has been love—there has been jealousy—and the wounded young gentleman——”

“Oh, detain me no longer,” cried Ciprina; “but give me whatsoever medicaments you may deem requisite; and as your skill is great, I beseech you to furnish me with whatsoever hints and suggestions for his treatment you may deem it advisable to offer from all that I have told you.”

The wise-woman bade Ciprina remain where she was, while she passed into the adjacent room, closing the door behind her. In about ten minutes she reappeared, carrying two phials and a small box in her hand.

“There,” she said, presenting one of the phials, “is a potion which you must administer to your patient immediately on your return to the house. It will produce a long and deep sleep: but when the slumber passes away, you will be enabled to judge of the good effects of the medicament. If to-morrow evening you find your patient at any restless and irritable—I mean, if any circumstances should arise to counteract partially or materially the good effects of this potion—you must administer the pill contained in this box; and a balmy slumber will again ensue. This second phial contains my sovereign antidote, the efficacy of which you have already been enabled to appreciate.”

Ciprina received the two phials and the pill-box, and secured them about her person. She then bestowed a further proof of her liberality upon the wise-woman; and she was about to take her departure, when recollecting something, she inquired, “Has the Marchioness of Mirano been to you to complain that your poison was ineffectual, or to ask an explanation of its failure?”

La Dolcina shook her head.

“And if she were to come and demand some poison which could not possibly fail——”

“Set your mind at ease,” rejoined the woman. “Did I not tell you the other night that the antidote is efficacious against every possible poison that passes the portals of the lips?”

“Enough!” ejaculated Ciprina; and bestowing upon the woman a good-natured grateful smile, she took her departure. As she proceeded along the streets, she said to herself, “And thus I have discovered where the wretched Lucrezia purchased the poison with which she meant to take my life and that of Edgar!”

On the other hand La Dolcina, while counting over the pieces of gold she had received from the young lady, chuckled and laughed as she said to herself, “This is a good evening’s work! Yes—

not only in respect to what I have now in my hand”——and she chinked the gold——“but likewise in reference to what I may obtain from Lucrezia Mirano. Love—jealousy—and a wounded young gentleman! Then, doubtless because the dagger had failed to do its work, recourse must be had to poison! The whole matter is as clear as possible! Yes, yes!——and if the Marchioness comes to me again, I shall know how to play my game with her. The pretty Ciprina revealed as much as it was important for me to know; whereas I on the other hand cared nothing for revealing what I did in reference to myself in order to evoke her confidence and draw her out!”

Meanwhile Ciprina was wending her way back to the Mirano mansion, which she re-entered without being observed by any one; and she ascended to her suite of apartments. Antonia was in the ante-room, keeping watch: but her services had not been required during the hour of Ciprina’s absence. The young lady hastened to the invalid’s chamber; and she found him impatient for her return—so that the moment she made her appearance he spoke fretfully and petulantly, complaining that she had been absent so long. Ciprina, without showing the least anger at the unjust and unkind accusation, replied with great sweetness, assuring Edgar that she had been detained by the wise-woman herself, and producing the potion which she had brought with her. The young Frenchman, perceiving that he had spoken harshly, threw his arms about Ciprina’s neck—drew her face down to his own—and imprinted kisses upon her lips. He then swallowed the potion which she administered; and in a few minutes he sank off into a profound slumber.

Ciprina watched for a long time by the side of his couch; and she was rejoiced to perceive with what tranquillity and serenity he slept. At length feeling assured that this slumber would last in its refreshing placidity throughout the night, Ciprina resolved to make preparations for retiring to her own couch. Assisted by Antonia, she examined the pieces of silken thread which were hung along the walls of the boudoir and the two bed-chambers, to assure herself that they were all in order, and that the bell hanging over the head of her bed would be rung by the slightest vibration of any of those threads. Antonia then made her own bed on the sofa which stood against the wainscot wall in the ante-room; and shortly afterwards the silence of sleep prevailed throughout that suite of apartments.

The night passed without any disturbance; and when Ciprina awoke in the morning and peeped into Edgar’s chamber, she found that he was still slumbering serenely. She let him sleep on; and it was not until between ten and eleven in the forenoon that he awoke. He was much refreshed—his spirits were improved—his temper had lost that irritability which it had on the previous day displayed: his eyes were brighter—and there was a slight colour upon his cheeks. But this was not the hectic hue of fever: it was a wholesome sign—his hands were cool—his lips were moist—and his tongue was no longer parched.

“Another night’s rest such as this,” exclaimed Ciprina, with accents and looks of delight, “and you will be convalescent!”

“Yes—if the machinations of that vile woman,”

returned Edgar, "should leave us at peace in the meanwhile. Do you know whether she has returned from her villa?"

"Antonia has just inquired," answered Ciprina: "and it does not appear, from what she has been enabled to learn, that Lucrezia intends to come back to the mansion to-day. Perhaps she may be tired of warfare?—she may have withdrawn herself from the conflict—she is giving us to understand that if we on our side will suspend or abandon hostilities——"

"Ab, Ciprina!" interrupted Edgar, "how can we possibly make terms with the murderers?"

"Well, well, my dear Edgar," the young lady hastened to exclaim, "we will not touch upon these topics now: we will wait until to-morrow, when you will be stronger and better."

"Yes—we will wait till to-morrow," rejoined Edgar. "But still, my dear Ciprina, there is something that you must do for me to-day."

"Speak, Edgar!—what can I do for you? You know that you have but to express a wish——"

"You are all kindness towards me," said the young Frenchman, pressing her hand to his lips.

"Listen to me, dear Ciprina. You know how uneasy I have been relative to that unfortunate man, Signor Paoli——"

"But what can be done?" asked Ciprina. "It is now four days since he was expelled from Florence by the police——"

"And during this interval," interjected Marcellin, "he may have found some means of communicating with the landlord of the house where he dwelt when in this city. Petrero—for that I believe is the man's name—was deeply interested in poor Paoli. Paoli himself told me so—and Antonia gave us a similar assurance."

"And now what do you wish to be done?" asked Ciprina.

"I wish that Antonia should pay another visit to Petrero, to ascertain if he have received any communication from Paoli."

"She shall go at once," answered Ciprina.

"One moment!" ejaculated Marcellin. "If it should turn out that Paoli has not already communicated with Petrero, he is certain to do so the moment he can find an opportunity. Besides, as yet there may not have been time for such communication—because we know not to what distance Paoli may have been compelled to betake himself from the Tuscan territory:—he may have been forbidden to halt in any of the neighbouring States under penalty of being pursued by the vengeance of the Tuscan Police, or entangled in the whole Italian network of confederated tyrannies."

"And therefore," said Ciprina, "it may be some days or a week before you can hear from Signor Paoli."

"This is what I mean," rejoined Marcellin, "and consequently I am desirous of opening some prompt method of communication between his landlord Petrero and myself, so that if Paoli shall write to him before I am enabled to leave the sick chamber, there need be no delay in my becoming acquainted with the movements of the unfortunate Neapolitan refugee and with the place of his present abode."

"Do you not think it would be unwise," asked Ciprina, "to let any one know more of what has

taken place than is absolutely necessary? You have not yet made up your mind what course you mean to adopt towards the wretched Marchioness——"

"Well, well," said Edgar, who was as anxious to avoid this topic as Ciprina herself usually felt "arrange the whole business as you think fit."

"Antonia shall tell Petrero," responded Ciprina, "that she will call upon him every evening and every morning, to ascertain whether he has received any communication from Signor Paoli."

"Be it so," said Marcellin. "And now, my dear Ciprina, let the good girl at once set off."

Antonia, who was in the ante-room, received her instructions accordingly, and away she went. In about half-an-hour she returned, having seen Petrero: but this worthy man had received no communication of any sort from Paoli.

"And what did you tell him?" inquired Marcellin, who was reclining upon a sofa in the boudoir.

"I said that I would call every morning and every evening," replied Antonia, "to see if any tidings came from Signor Paoli. Petrero begged me to come early in the morning and late in the evening, for fear lest such regular and frequent visits on the part of the same person should excite any suspicion: for he is known to be favourable to the Italian democratic cause, and the police have an eye upon him—so that it would only require some slight circumstance to cause his letters to be intercepted; and if it were found that he was corresponding with Paoli, it might get him into more trouble."

"Well, then," inquired Marcellin, "what arrangement did you make?"

"Petrero himself suggested the arrangement," answered Antonia. "He bade me call every morning between seven and eight, and every night at ten o'clock. I promised that I would do so, and thus the matter was settled."

"Thanks, my good girl," said Marcellin: and then he thought within himself, "Heaven grant that you may not be compelled to pay those stealthy visits to Signor Petrero's for any number of days; but that I may be enabled to leave the sick chamber and to take all these matters into my own hand!"

CHAPTER X.

PETERO.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening when a postchaise drove into the court-yard of one of the principal hotels of Florence, and a young gentleman alighted. He was about twenty years of age—moderately tall of stature—of slender figure—and of a perfect masculine symmetry. There was a certain natural ease and elegance about him, which, together with the excellence of his apparel and the mode in which he travelled, indicated the gentleman. Indeed, our readers are doubtless already prepared to learn that this was none other than our young hero Charles De Vere.

Having ordered private apartments, and com-

manded that dinner should be served with the least possible delay, Charles performed his ablutions and made some change in his toilet,—both of which processes were agreeable enough after having travelled night and day without stopping from Naples to Florence. The cause of this suddenly undertaken and rapidly accomplished journey shall be immediately explained to the reader.

On issuing from the bed-chamber to the sitting-room where dinner was now being served up, Charles drew forth a letter from his pocket; and pressing it to his lips, he kissed it two or three times with all the fervour of a young man's devoted love towards an amiable and beautiful being who was in every sense worthy of that strong attachment. During the intervals of the repast, Charles read and re-read the letter half-a-dozen times, though he had previously read and re-read it twice as many times during his journey from Naples to Florence. The letter bore the date of the 19th of October, which was the very same day whereon Edgar Marcellin had met Lisetta in London, and through her intervention had not merely been enabled to obtain access to Corinna at Sidney Villa, but had likewise communicated to this young lady and to Agnes Evelyn the certainty that the Marchioness of Mirano had been the murderess of Giulio. The letter of Agnes therefore, we say, had been written on that same day; and immediately on receiving it at Naples, after the usual postal interval, Charles had set off for Florence, where we now find him arriving in the evening of the 1st of November.

It is not our purpose to transcribe the whole of Agnes Evelyn's letter; we shall therefore merely transfer to the pages of our narrative a sufficient extract to render the reader acquainted with the precise nature of Charles De Vere's mission.

"And now, my dear Charles," wrote Agnes, "I have given the full details of all that the Italian girl Lisetta and M. Marcellin have communicated to Corinna Paoli and myself. M. Marcellin leaves England without delay to proceed to Florence. In the hurry of his departure just now from Sydney Villa, I omitted to mention to him that I intended to write to you upon the subject. Therefore, dear Charles, if you can by any possible means manage to leave your diplomatic duties for a brief space, and repair to Florence to render your assistance, if needed, you will find M. Marcellin there. You may have already seen, from the details I have recorded, that it is an affair to be treated with the utmost circumspection, prudence, and delicacy. Signor Paoli is himself unfortunately placed as a Neapolitan refugee who may at any instant be ordered out of the Tuscan territory; while M. Marcellin stands a chance of being denounced *openly* as the assassin of Giulio, as he has already been *secretly* accused of that crime: for everything is now to be expected alike from the vengeance and from the fears of the wicked Marchioness. You perceive therefore, dear Charles, that this is not a case in which your diplomatic position may at once enable you to apply to the Tuscan authorities, to initiate prompt and active measures against the Marchioness. You will have to be guided by circumstances. You must see Signor Paoli in the first instance; and he will doubtless introduce you to M. Marcellin, who must necessarily arrive in Florence some few days

before you can be there. You will then learn to what extent M. Marcellin may have succeeded in collecting evidences according to the hints and suggestions he received from Lisetta in London. In short, my dear Charles, I know that you will be enabled to assist the unfortunate Signor Paoli and the falsely accused M. Marcellin with your counsel in the first instance, and afterwards no doubt by the interest which your position enables you to command and which can be brought to bear upon the Tuscan Government. I know likewise that for more reasons than one you will be glad to take this mission in hand; because you will be rendering me a service, for I feel deeply interested in everything that concerns my amiable young friend Corinna—and because you will be aiding the purposes of justice and of righteous retribution."

The reader now comprehends the precise motives which had brought Charles De Vere to Florence. The distance was about two hundred and eighty miles; and as Italian travelling, even by post, and when money is lavished on the postillions, is never of a very delectable description, it may be easily understood how at the rate of about eight miles an hour it had taken our hero upwards of thirty-six hours, including stoppages, to accomplish the distance. Those stoppages had only been for the purpose of changing horses; for whatsoever refreshments Charles required, he had partaken of in the vehicle. Thus on arriving in Florence, it was natural enough that he should allow himself an hour for his ablutions, his change of toilet, and his repast, ere he entered upon the business which he had in hand.

Having concluded his repast, Charles was thinking about inquiring of the waiter for a porter to conduct him to the street where he expected to find Signor Paoli, when he beheld a plan or map of Florence suspended in a neat frame to the wall of the apartment. By means of a couple of minutes' study of this map, our young hero was enabled to make himself master of the relative positions of the hotel where he had taken up his quarters, and of the street to which he was about to bend his way. He therefore dispensed with any guide; and setting out, found himself in about ten minutes in the particular street which he sought. He now looked for the number of the house to which the instructions of Agnes had directed him; and he perceived that it was a private residence,—the dwelling being a small one, with no carriage gateway—an omission by no means usual in the Florentine capital, where the houses are chiefly built in the form of a square, accommodating a great number of families.

Charles rang the bell: his summons was answered by a neatly dressed girl of fifteen or sixteen, who in reply to his question relative to Signor Petraro, informed him that her father was at home: he was conducted up a staircase into a small neatly furnished room, where he was left alone for two or three minutes,—at the expiration of which interval a short middle-aged man, wearing spectacles, made his appearance.

"My name is Petraro, signor," he said, with a bow that was sufficiently polite, though it indicated a certain degree of reserve: "may I ask what business you have with me?"

"I believe that a Neapolitan refugee of the name of Paoli, is living beneath your roof?"

"No, signor," responded Petraro. "Paoli is no longer here."

"Ah! then he has removed," ejaculated Charles; "but you can doubtless indicate his new abode?"

"Signor Paoli is no longer in Florence—nor yet in Tuscany," rejoined Petraro; and all the time he was steadily surveying the youth through the large circular glasses of his spectacles.

"No longer in Tuscany? But tell me——"

"The short and the long of it is, signor," interrupted Petraro, "Signor Paoli was expelled by the police in the morning of the 29th of October: he was escorted to the outskirts of Florence—I accompanied the poor man—and I heard the *sbirri* give him the most positive orders to leave the Tuscan territory with the least possible delay."

"Good heavens!" cried Charles. "And whither, then, has he gone?"

"I should say into the Duchy of Lucca—for that is the nearest: but I do not know."

"And has anything been done?" inquired Charles,—"I mean in reference to the business which specially brought him to Florence?"

"I know nothing more than this, signor," answered Petraro,—"that Paoli came to Florence to investigate the mysterious assassination of his son Giulio; but beyond that fact I am unacquainted with every detail. He was a mere lodger here—he paid me honourably——"

"Now look you!" interrupted Charles: "I am not surprised that you speak guardedly, and that you even appear mistrustful: for such terrible things are done in Italy that make the blood of Englishmen run cold or else fire it with indignation!"

"Ah, then you are an Englishman?" exclaimed Petraro, his countenance brightening up.

"Yes: and in order to prove that I am dealing with all possible frankness, I will tell you who I am. Here is my card. I have journeyed all the way from Naples to render whatsoever assistance I might be able to Signor Paoli——"

"Ah, signor, how kind of you!" exclaimed Petraro, his manner now undergoing the most complete change, and becoming all urbanity and kindness instead of coldness and reserve. "Depend upon it there are some persons who do not want this affair of the murder to be investigated, and who therefore have set in movement the machinery of the police."

"Perhaps, then," said Charles, "you have your suspicion?"

"Perhaps I have, signor," replied Petraro: "but without entertaining any farther mistrust towards yourself, I may just as well observe that it would be only a waste of time for you and me to discuss the business—because I am so situated that I cannot offer to render any assistance in it. I have a wife and children to support, and dare not get at loggerheads with the police."

"And I will not for a moment do aught that may compromise you," rejoined Charles. "But tell me—has there been a French gentleman here to see Paoli?"

"Yes," replied Petraro;—"a French gentleman called the very evening before Paoli was arrested by the police. Paoli was out at the time: he returned home greatly agitated, exclaiming something about a purse and a certain Marchioness——"

"Yes—I understand," interjected Charles: "the Marchioness of Mirano?"

"Well, it is you who say it, signor," observed Petraro, but with a significant smile. "Paoli, as I was telling you, came home in this almost frenzied state: I told him a French gentleman had called—he said he knew it, and that he had seen the gentleman, who would call again presently—and that I was at once to admit him. Paoli sat up the whole night; but the Frenchman returned not—and then in the morning, between eight and nine o'clock, the police came and arrested the unfortunate Neapolitan."

"And what did he say?" inquired Charles. "Did he not protest——"

"For a single moment—and then he held his tongue," rejoined Petraro; "for this very good reason—that a couple of carbines were pointed at his head, with the threat that his brains would be blown out if he dared speak a word. So, like a wise man, he held his peace. I accompanied him—or rather I should say I followed the party to the outskirts of Florence: but the *sbirri* would not suffer me to exchange a single word with Paoli, and he was sent off in some vehicle hired at the moment for the purpose."

"And this young Frenchman," said Charles inquiringly,—"have you not seen him since?"

"No, signor," responded Petraro: "but I have heard of him."

"Ah, indeed? And where is he?"

"Softly, signor," interjected Petraro. "I myself know very little on the subject. I am too prudent to ask many questions—I only give answers to the questions which are put to me: but what little I know shall be cheerfully imparted to you—for the longer I gaze upon your frank open countenance, the more am I convinced that you are an honest good young man. I must tell you, therefore, that in the afternoon or evening of the very same day on which Paoli was arrested and carried off, a young girl called upon me. She had the air of being handmaiden or *camerista* of some lady, for she was very genteel and well dressed. She told me she came on the part of the French gentleman who had called the evening before; and then the girl inquired for Signor Paoli. I told her what had happened in respect to Paoli's arrest and expulsion; and the girl went away."

"And have you not seen her since?" inquired Charles.

"Yes," answered Petraro,—"in the forenoon of this very day."

"Ah! and the French gentleman?"

"I know nothing about him beyond this—that he is most anxious to learn where Signor Paoli now is: and he believes that Paoli cannot fail shortly to communicate his address to me. To be brief, signor, I have told the young girl that she may call every morning and evening, under circumstances of due caution, to inquire whether I have received any communication from Signor Paoli. But I do not know who the girl is—nor whence she comes—nor who the young Frenchman is—nor where he is—nor why he does not come himself: and to tell you the truth, signor, I do not want to have more to do with the matter than I can possibly help; for when the police meddle in such affairs, they are apt to become awkward and embarrassing."

"And I have already assured you, my good man," replied Charles, "that I would not for the world compromise you. But this young girl of whom you have spoken—when will she call again?"

"At ten o'clock this evening," was the answer.

"At ten o'clock!" ejaculated Charles. "Ah! this is excellent! It is now nine," he added, referring to his watch. "May I return here at ten?"

"Return in welcome, signor," responded Petraro: "or remain altogether, if you prefer it, until the girl comes. I can produce a good bottle of wine—and it would honour me to have your company."

Charles accepted the invitation: the wine was produced—and the conversation turned upon general topics, for Petraro had nothing now to say upon the one which most especially interested our young hero at the present time. The hour glided away; and as the clock struck ten, there was a ring at the bell.

"This is the girl, I have no doubt," said Petraro: and he quitted the room.

In less than a minute he reappeared, ushering in Antonia, to whom he said, "I leave you with this young gentleman, whom I believe to be a very worthy one—though really the world has come to such a pass that nobody ought to guarantee the integrity of any one whom he has not known for the best part of his life."

Having thus spoken, the cautious Petraro withdrew, leaving Antonia and Charles De Vere alone together.

"You come from a young French gentleman," immediately said Charles, "to ascertain whether the landlord of this lodging-house has received any communication from a certain Signor Paoli?"

"Yes, Signor—that is my object," answered Antonia, resolving to be upon her guard.

"And the French gentleman's name is Marcellin," continued Charles.

"It may be, signor, for anything I know to the contrary: but—"

"You mistrust me?" interrupted De Vere. "But believe me, I am a friend. I have journeyed from Naples to Florence expressly to further the views of Signor Paoli and Edgar Marcellin; otherwise, do you think that I should be here?"

"I have no doubt, signor, that you are speaking the exact truth," responded Antonia; "but I am sure you will forgive me if I adopt a certain degree of caution—or rather, I should say, if I only go to the extent of the mission entrusted to me. But I will deliver any note or message to the French gentleman—"

"Be it so!" exclaimed Charles. "Ah! when I bethink me, how long will it take you to return into his presence?—for I am burning with impatience to see him—I shall ask him for an interview this very evening—he will accord it—"

"It is quite possible, signor, for me to depart with your billet, deliver it, and return with the answer, so that I may be here again all within an hour—perhaps indeed in half that time."

"Excellent!" ejaculated Charles. "You have nothing to do but to take my card and to say that I have come to Florence in consequence of a letter received from Miss Evelyn of Sidney Villa in London. Stop! I will write it with a pencil on the back of my card."

This was speedily done; and Antonia took her departure from Petraro's house, Charles having assured her that he should wait there for her return. Antonia hastened back to the Mirano mansion, thinking of the handsome and genteel young man whom she had just left. On ascending to Ciprina's suite of apartments, she found the young lady seated by the side of Edgar Marcellin's bed; for the invalid had retired to his couch immediately after Antonia set out to call at Petraro's dwelling. The moment Antonia crossed the threshold of the bed-chamber, both Edgar and Ciprina perceived by the expression of her countenance that she had something of importance to communicate; and the invalid ejaculated with feverish impatience, "What news, Antonia? what news?"

"I found at Signor Petraro's," replied the maiden, "a young gentleman who says that he has travelled I don't know how many leagues in order to assist Signor Paoli and yourself—"

"Who on earth can this be?" cried Edgar. "Where does he come from?"

"He comes from Naples—Oh! he is quite young and genteel; and he knows your name, signor."

"But his name?—what is it?" exclaimed Marcellin, whose impatience was now worked up to a feverish intenseness.

"Here is his card, signor. You will see something written at the back with pencil."

Antonia produced the card: Ciprina was on the point of taking it for the purpose of handing it to Edgar Marcellin—but the latter clatched it with a haste that showed how feverish his impatience was; and the name of De Vere burst from his lips.

"De Vere?" said Ciprina. "Indeed? Is that an English name?"

"English or not," responded Edgar, "it is in this case borne by an English gentleman. Ah! here is what is written at the back! '*Mr. De Vere's compliments to M. Marcellin, and has come to Florence in consequence of a letter from Miss Evelyn of Sidney Villa, St. John's Wood, London. Mr. De Vere requests an immediate interview.*'—Do you hear that, Ciprina? Why, really, one would think that all this was a perfect matter of indifference to you: for here you are preparing the beverages and beginning to put the room to rights for the night, just as if I should think of going to sleep before I had seen Mr. De Vere!"

"Oh, believe me, Edgar," said Ciprina, turning hastily towards him with a sweet deprecating smile upon her lips, "I cannot possibly be indifferent to anything which interests or regards you!"

"Forgive me, dear Ciprina! I was hasty!" said Marcellin: "I was too impetuous! But, Oh! I fear I have wounded your feelings very much! You are pale—pale as death! Good God!—and how icy chill your hand!"

"It is nothing—it is nothing," said Ciprina: "but the evening itself is cold—and here have I been letting the fire get low!"

"On the contrary, Ciprina—the evening is quite warm; and we were speaking of this comparative sultriness only a few minutes before Antonia's return."

"True! it is very warm," said Ciprina: and for

a moment she placed her hand upon her forehead like one who is bewildered by some intense racking of the brain.

"My dear girl," said Marcellin, now looking at her very seriously, and speaking very earnestly, "I see that you are distressed by my abrupt and impetuous manner towards you. You have every reason to be. I have more than once spoken petulantly and angrily——"

"For heaven's sake do not utter another syllable of excuse, Edgar!" interrupted Ciprina. "I am not angry—I am not offended! Only——only——these constant successions of excitement will end by killing you outright!"

Her face bent forward until it rested on Edgar's shoulder—for he was half sitting up in the bed; and she burst into tears. For nearly a minute so passionate was that outburst of weeping—so violent this gush of emotions—that it really seemed as if the young lady's heart were about to break. Edgar, to do him justice, forgot for the time everything in reference to Charles De Vere; and winding his arms about Ciprina's neck, he strained her to his breast—he said all he could to console her. She left off sobbing—she wiped the tears from her large black eyes—smiles now played upon her lips—and she murmured in the melodious intonations of her voice, "I have been very foolish, Edgar—but pardon me this outburst of grief, and think of it no more."

"Oh! I am happy, Ciprina," he responded, "now that I see you smile again! Did you hear what I read on the back of this card, dearest? But stay! you know English very well—Indeed, I remember once to have heard it said, when I was formerly in Florence, that you speak the language as well as a native——"

"Oh, yes—I can read English with the utmost facility," she said, as she took the card which Edgar Marcellin now handed to her. "But who—but who——"

"Oh, do not ask me any questions now, dearest!" ejaculated Edgar, playfully placing his fingers upon Ciprina's rosy lips. "I am in all haste to see Mr. De Vere! Let Antonia depart again!—let her conduct the young English gentleman hither! Will you give these orders, Ciprina?"

"Yes—at once," answered the young lady. "Compose yourself—lie down again, I beseech you—for it is this excitement which does you so much harm, and therefore makes me so very, very unhappy."

"I will do everything you tell me, Ciprina," rejoined Marcellin.

Antonia—on perceiving that sudden outburst of strong feelings on the part of her mistress—had discreetly retired from the bed-chamber, and had sought the ante-room,—thus passing from one extremity of the suite to the other. Ciprina hastened to join the damsel in that ante-room—on entering which, she closed the door behind her.

"Tell me, Antonia," she said, "exactly what passed between yourself and Signor De Vere."

Antonia gave the required explanations, which were brief enough, as the reader may suppose from what has been recorded in reference to the interview between the *camerista* and the young diplomatist.

"And therefore he knows nothing?" said Ci-

prina: "he asked no questions? But no! how foolish on my part! How could he know? how could he even suspect?—Antonía," she continued, seeming all in a moment to recover her presence of mind, "you must go back to Signor De Vere—you must tell him that the French gentleman will receive him immediately—but you need not tell him that he is ill or wounded—you need not say that it is to the Mirasol mansion he is being led!"

"I will say nothing, signora," observed Antonia, "except that he is to follow me. Have you any further instructions?"

"Yes," rejoined Ciprina, looking at her watch: "it is now eleven o'clock. Be not too hasty!—I mean, you need not be in too great a hurry to bring the English gentleman hither. If he is here by midnight, it will suffice. Ah! and one word more! The moment you have introduced him into this ante-room, you may retire. Never mind if the light be burning dim, or if you do not find me here—I will see that proper attention is paid to the English visitor. Do you understand?"

"I will obey your orders, signora," answered the *camerista*; and she then took her departure.

The moment she was gone, Ciprina retraced her way as far as her own bed-chamber, where a silver chocolate pot was being kept heated over a spirit-lamp. She poured into a cup a small quantity of the chocolate: she then took the pill which La Dolícea had given her in the box on the preceding evening: and this pill she put into the cup.

"He must sleep!" she thought within herself: "he must sleep while I have this interview with Charles De Vere! To-morrow they may meet perhaps—but not till then! I have now a clear hour before me. Ah! it was well thought on my part to bid Antonia delay his coming until midnight! During the interval the soporific medication will perform its work, and Edgar will sleep! Ah, if I were to beseech him to take this medicine for his good, he would refuse!—he would not take a soporific, now that he expects to meet Charles De Vere! Therefore must I deceive him by means of this beverage: and Ah! I deplore the necessity of using deception with him!"

When she found that the pill was completely dissolved in the chocolate, Ciprina passed into the inner room, carrying the cup.

"Here, Edgar," she said; "it is rather late for you to take any more chocolate to-night—but it is strengthening—you seem to fancy it more than anything else——"

"Yes—the very thing that I was on the point of asking for!" he exclaimed: and then he kissed the hand which presented him the cup. "You have sent Antonia to fetch Charles De Vere?" he asked, as he gave back the cup, having swallowed its contents.

"Yes," replied Ciprina. "But this Charles De Vere, as you call him——"

"I will tell you, Ciprina, all about it," interrupted Marcellin. "You must have read the name of Agnes Evelyn——"

"Agnes," echoed Ciprina, it might almost have seemed mechanically.

"Ah, I forgot!" said Marcellin: "the name of Agnes is not on this card—it is simply Miss Evelyn that Mr. De Vere has written. But now

you know her name to be Agnes Evelyn. Well, then, Agnes Evelyn is a most excellent-hearted and benevolent young lady—and accident threw her in the way of the Paoli family at a time when they were in the greatest distress. Paoli's children are now living at Sidney Villa."

"Ah, then you have doubtless seen them at this—how is the villa called?" and Ciprina stopped down to pick up the card which she had just let fall from her hand. "Ah! Sidney Villa!"

"Yes—I saw them at Sidney Villa—and it was from one of the children I happened to learn that Miss Evelyn is engaged to a young diplomatist named Charles De Vere."

"And therefore that name was immediately familiar to you?" said Ciprina. "But what do you suppose—I mean, what—?"

"You mean to ask what Charles De Vere can purpose to do? This is very strange—there is a drowsiness—but I must shake it off. Ah! that's it! I must sit up in the bed. How foolish I was! Of course if one lies down, sleep is sure to come stealing over one!"

"And Agnes Evelyn," said Ciprina,—"this young lady of whom you spoke—"

"Speak louder, dearest," interjected Edgar; "for either your voice is very tremulous and low—or else I am really getting more and more sleepy. Ah! you were speaking of Agnes? She is very good, and very lovely. She is generally known by the title of *The Beauty of Sidney Villa*; and some of the people in the neighbourhood call her *Beauty* just as if it were a regular name, or as they might say *Agnes*. Corinna told me all this."

"And who is Corinna?" asked Ciprina. "Oh—I suppose one of the Paoli family?"

"Yes—just so," responded Marcellin, who was every instant getting more and more drowsy. "Paoli's daughter—a girl of some sixteen or so—"

"And beautiful doubtless?" asked Ciprina, somewhat quickly.

"Yes—beautiful—both beautiful—Agnes and Corinna," murmured Marcellin, with his eyes more than half closed and his head falling forward upon his breast: "both beautiful—both beautiful. What was I saying?" he asked, opening his eyes and staring vacantly. "Ah! Agnes—yes they call her *Beauty*. And she had a cousin—let me see—I heard—her name—I have forgotten it—Ah! no! it was—it was—Floribel! that was it! And she ran away—a splendid creature, I believe she was—so Corinna heard it said—and now no one knows what on earth has become of her. Yes—yes—no I mean!—but Agnes has somehow or another received the assurance that her cousin—what is her name?—Ah! Floribel!—has become virtuous again—and gone into some strict seclusion—I don't know whether—whether it's a convent or not—but—but—I did hear that Miss Evelyn is now tranquillized about her erring cousin."

Here Edgar Marcellin fell back upon the pillows: he made one more effort to open his eyes and lift his head; but it failed—and a profound slumber seized upon him.

Ciprina started up from her seat by the bedside: at the same moment she caught a glimpse

of her countenance in an opposite mirror, and she saw that it was as pale as death. Even her very lips were bloodless, and she was affrighted at this contemplation of herself. There was something awful in her aspect: it was so altered that it seemed as if she never could become changed back again to what she naturally was. Quickly averting her regards from the mirror, she looked at her watch. It wanted ten minutes to midnight.

"Ample time!" she mentally ejaculated.

She then took a lamp and hastened into the ante-room, where a couple of tapers were burning upon the mantel. Both these tapers she extinguished: and she turned down the wick of the lamp in such a way that it only shed a very dim and partial light through the room. She then hastened back into her own chamber, where she drew from a wardrobe an ample cloak, and from a drawer she took forth a thick black veil. She next peeped into the furthestmost chamber, where she perceived that Edgar Marcellin was still sleeping profoundly. She closed the door of communication between the two chambers; and when again in her own apartment, she put on the cloak—she covered her head with the veil, folding it in such a manner that it was totally impossible for even the keenest eye to obtain a glimpse of her features. She then passed into the boudoir, closing the door behind her:—thence she proceeded into the ante-room, and this last door she likewise shut.

The ante-room, as we have already said, was merely dimly and partially lighted by the feebly burning lamp; and Ciprina, muffled in the dark cloak and with a black veil over her head, appeared to be a gloomy shape from another world in the midst of that sombre semi-obscurity. She heard footsteps approach on the landing outside: the outer-door of her suite of apartments was thrown open—and Charles De Vere was introduced into her presence.

CHAPTER XI.

THE INTERVIEW AND ITS RESULTS.

THE door immediately closed again; and Antonia retired according to the instructions which she had received. Our hero was stricken with astonishment on finding himself in so gloomy an apartment, and in the presence of what seemed to be the funeral form of a woman instead of that of a young man who would at once announce his name to be Edgar Marcellin. And our readers will not think one whit the less favourably of Charles De Vere's courage, if we admit that he was even for a moment smitten with a sense of alarm at everything which was so totally different from what he had expected—the more so as the young girl who had guided him thither, closed the door upon him and disappeared, as if she were thus leaving him in some treacherous snare to which she had lured him. But that feeling of alarm was as evanescent as a passing shadow; and it even left him before Ciprina, in a soft low voice, said in the French language, "Pardon me, sir, for giving you such a strange reception as this: but there are reasons which I will presently explain."



CORINNA.

De Vere bowed with his accustomed politeness, as he said, "I certainly expected, madam, to find myself in the presence of a gentleman whom I am very anxious to see."

"I know it," rejoined Ciprina; "and M. Marcellin was equally anxious to meet Mr. De Vere, who has been good enough to journey nearly three hundred miles to proffer whatsoever assistance may be in his power. Pray be seated, sir—for we must have some little discourse together."

Our hero sat down; and Ciprina likewise took a chair—but it was at some little distance from the one which the youth occupied.

"In the first place I must inform you," resumed Ciprina, "that M. Marcellin is very unwell: he had retired to rest before the young
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female servant brought your card from Signor Petraro's—and though he struggled against the sense of uneasiness and exhaustion which came over him, it was in vain that he strove——"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated De Vere; "how unfortunately everything is progressing!"

"Alas, I know it!" said Ciprina, still speaking in the same low soft voice as before, and which indeed was only audible because of the profound silence which otherwise reigned. "Signor Paoli has been torn away from Florence by the police—M. Marcellin is ill——"

"May I hope," interjected De Vere, "that there is nothing alarming nor grave in this illness?"

"Nothing, sir," rejoined Ciprina. "The best
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proof which I can give you is contained in the assurance that to-morrow evening, between eight and nine o'clock, he shall meet you at Signor Petraro's dwelling."

"Ah, that is more favourable!" ejaculated Charles joyfully. "But may I inquire the meaning of all this mystery,—why the young guide who brought me hither, maintained so studied a silence when asked whither she was conducting me—why I was not permitted to know to what mansion I was being brought—and why——"

Charles stopped short, looking slowly round the room as if in allusion to its obscurity, with that dimly lighted lamp—and then settling his regards upon the muffled and veiled form of Ciprina herself.

"Everything shall be explained," resumed the young lady: "but I am about to make an appeal to you as a gentleman——"

"Madam, I begin to understand!" cried Charles, as he fancied that all in a moment a light broke in upon his comprehension. "M. Marcellin has doubtless found a friend who for certain reasons would fain continue unknown to every one but himself; and the mansion which now harbours him, must likewise continue unknown, lest the knowledge of it should at once indicate who the kind friend herself is."

"Your conjecture is accurate," responded Ciprina. "Oh, sir! you now comprehend how it is that an erring but loving woman throws herself upon your mercy! My honour is involved—and were it not on account of the deep anxiety of Edgar Marcellin to see you with the least possible delay, you would not have been introduced within these walls!"

"Madam," replied De Vere, "I am a gentleman and a man of honour. You may rely upon me! I would not for the world do aught that should menace the happiness of a lady who throws herself upon my mercy; I even regret that circumstances should have rendered it necessary for you to give an explanation which savours of an appeal."

"A thousand, thousand thanks for this generous language!" responded Ciprina: "but such conduct on your part is nothing less than what I could have expected from an English gentleman in the high diplomatic service of his country. You promise me, therefore, that you will not make any attempt to discover whose mansion this is to which you have been brought—nor who the lady is that now addresses you?"

"I swear most solemnly," exclaimed the chivalrous-minded Charles, "that unless accident should at any time reveal these secrets to my knowledge, they shall never become known to me through any inquiry or research of my own."

"Again I thank you, sir," said the young lady. "To-morrow evening, I repeat, you shall see M. Marcellin; and he will reiterate the entreaties which I myself have made to the same effect."

"It is absolutely unnecessary," rejoined Charles, with vehemence. "I will not permit him to give utterance to a syllable upon the subject! Nay, I will tell you more! I am totally unacquainted with Florence; and from Signor Petraro's dwelling to this mansion I am completely ignorant of the streets through which your handmaiden led me. I will tell you more yet! The night is pitch dark—and I beheld not the aspect of the mansion. A wall, with overhanging trees, was skirted—the

maiden opened a door—we entered a garden—and then another door almost immediately admitted us into the house itself. I tell you all this in order that you may be completely reassured of the combination of circumstances, together with my own inclination, to induce me to keep the secret."

"Every syllable that flows from your lips convinces me," said Ciprina, "more and more of the generous loftiness of your sentiments and of the chivalrous honour with which you are inspired."

"Nay, madam," said the youth, "I am but performing a duty under the peculiar circumstances in which I find myself placed. Even if on going forth from this mansion I found the night as light as day, with the stars and moon shining—or if all Florence itself were brilliantly illuminated—I swear to you that I would speed away without casting a look behind me of impertinent curiosity. And now tell me, how long has M. Marcellin been afflicted with illness?—and has he made any progress towards the elucidation of that horrible mystery with which you are doubtless acquainted? Or rather, perhaps, I ought to ask whether he has succeeded in obtaining those evidences——"

Charles De Vere's speech was suddenly interrupted by what appeared to be the hursting open of a portion of the waistcoat; and in the twinkling of an eye half-a-dozen *sbirri* rushed into the ante-room. A scream rang forth from Ciprina's lips: the youth started up from his chair, with an ejaculation expressive of a sense of treachery: but both the young man and the young lady were seized upon in a moment. Carbines and drawn swords menaced them in fearful proximity: there was an instant's struggle on De Vere's part—but it was useless—for he was at once overpowered. A thick shawl was thrown over his head, while the same process was being adopted in respect to Ciprina; and they were tied over their mouths in such a way as to constitute gags muffling and stifling any sounds to which they might have given vent. But they were both silent now,—for Ciprina had fainted; and Charles De Vere, perceiving how useless it was to resist the will of his captors in any way, deemed it more prudent to hold his peace.

The *sbirri* hurried their two prisoners along the secret passage,—one of them tarrying for a moment to close the door opening into the ante-room; and as the foremost carried a light, there was no delay in threading the mysterious corridor. Down the staircase they hastened: one of their comrades had remained stationed at the door communicating with the stable-yard; and this therefore was thrown open the instant the party began to make its appearance. No intruder nor looker-on was in that yard: the prisoners were hurried onward to a gate opening into one of the streets that bounded the premises of the Mirano mansion: and a postchaise was in readiness at a little distance.

Into this vehicle Ciprina was lifted, and Charles De Vere was ordered to ascend. The former remained in a state of unconsciousness: the latter, being blindfolded, had continued in complete ignorance of the mode of egress by which he had been hurried forth from the interior of the mansion. A couple of the *sbirri* took their seats in the chaise, opposite the captives: a third mounted the box—and the equipage at once drove away.

So soon as the postilion had begun to whip his horses and the wheels were rattling over the pavement of the street, one of the *sbirri* said to Charles De Vere, "It is now unnecessary, signor, to keep you muffled and muzzled any longer: but I warn you that silence is expected—or if you like to converse, it must only be on the most indifferent topics. You are strictly forbidden to ask any questions in reference to your arrest—or to make any comment upon it—or even to mention the names of any persons in Florence—or to discourse with your female companion there upon any of these interdicted topics."

While the officer was yet speaking, he removed the shawl from off our young hero's head; and De Vere naturally made immediate use of his eyes by glancing around. The equipage was still within the streets of Florence—two *sbirri* were seated opposite to him—Ciprina was lying motionless in the corner of the back seat—or, in other words, by the side of Charles himself. All this was just as he had surmised from what he had been enabled to judge while still blindfolded.

"Why did you not render immediate assistance to this lady?" he demanded. "She has fainted—she may be half suffocated!"

"Not she!" ejaculated the *sbirro* who had before spoken, and who indeed was the officer that had been entrusted with the command of the expedition. "I never yet knew a lady who did not come round again after fainting through sheer fright."

"Brutal!" muttered Charles indignantly; and he had already removed the muffling shawl from Ciprina's head.

"Ah! where am I?" exclaimed the young lady, thus suddenly regaining her consciousness; and it was with a quick spasmodic start that she gave vent to the ejaculation, at the same time making a movement to assure herself that the veil was still over her countenance.

"Some hideous treachery," began Charles, "which I cannot understand—"

"Silence!" exclaimed the officer in a stern commanding voice. "You know, signor, what I just now told you. The orders which I have received are positive; and depend upon it they shall be obeyed to the very letter. Do not mistake me—and do not think that I speak in jest, or that I am giving utterance to inflated menaces that are never intended to be executed. You may see that I have a pistol in my hand; and if you neglect my advice, I will shoot you through the head!"

"And I tell you," exclaimed Charles, "despite your threats, that you and your superiors, and every one engaged in this outrage, shall bitterly repent—"

"Ah! you menace us!" exclaimed the officer of police: and the sharp click of a pistol, as the *sbirro* cocked it, was heard within the post-chaise.

"In the name of God," murmured Ciprina, as she caught hold of Charles De Vere's arm and held it with convulsive violence, "do nothing to irritate these officers!—their power is immense! For heaven's sake—"

"Tranquillize yourself, signora," interjected Charles: "I will do nothing to provoke a scene

that would certainly be replete with rashness on my part, terror on yours, and hideous crime on that of these two armed ruffians."

"Another insult!" ejaculated the officer fiercely. "Be prudent in your language, signor!"

"Oh, why irritate them?" murmured Ciprina, who was now labouring under a fearful consternation; for she every moment dreaded lest Charles De Vere should aggravate the officer to the utmost, and that a bloody deed might be the result.

"The command of a lady in such circumstances," said our young hero, "is with me paramount. Pray tell me, signora, how you feel yourself now? You faint—"

"Yes—and all that passed until I just now awoke to consciousness in this chaise, has been a blank. But you, signor—"

"You are not to touch upon the subject of your arrest," interposed the officer, "nor on the circumstances which immediately ensued thereupon."

"Then, in the name of common sense," demanded De Vere, whose blood was still boiling with indignation, "what topic may we touch upon? May I, for instance, expatiate on the unaccountable treatment thus bestowed on a foreigner,—a treatment as vile as it is mysterious—"

"No, signor!" interrupted the officer; "you must not touch on any such subject! In short, I see that the best thing I can do is to order you to hold your tongue at once. The young lady is more prudent—"

"But at least," said Ciprina, in an imploring tone, "tell us whither we are going—what our fate is to be—"

"All that I can tell you," responded the officer, "is that you have nothing to fear for your lives."

"Then it is our liberty of which we are to be deprived!" exclaimed De Vere indignantly; "and it is not a simple expulsion from the Tuscan territory which is now being accomplished for some erroneous or infamous cause or another—but—"

"I ordered you to remain silent, signor!" exclaimed the officer sternly. "If you cannot comply with my mandate, I shall again cause you to be muffled and gagged; and if your obstinate and perverse conduct demonstrate itself more signally than it has yet done, I shall separate you from the lady, put you into another chaise at the first post-house, and send you on by yourself."

"Ah!" thought Charles: "after all the formidable clicking of the pistol and the fulminated menaces, he has abandoned the idea of shooting me through the head!"

The reader may easily suppose that the suspicion had just arisen in our young hero's mind, that the officer of *sbirri* was not quite so desperate and determined a person, as he had at first endeavoured to make himself appear. Indeed, Charles was not very much disinclined to suppose that there was no small amount of braggadocio, vapour, and bluster, in the officer's conduct, and he further suspected that if this surmise should happen to be correct, the man might have some spice of cowardice in his disposition. The consequence was that a certain idea sprang up in our hero's mind; and he thought within himself, "I will not say any more at present to provoke the fellow to put me into another chaise and under the guard of

another escort: but I will remain tranquilly where I am and watch my opportunity."

He therefore remained silent; and throwing himself back in his own corner of the chaise, he folded his arms across his breast, his head inclining forward as if he were either giving way to his reflections or yielding to a sensation of drowsiness. By his side sat Ciprina, also plunged in silence. The reader will recollect that she had on a thick veil and an ample cloak at the moment she was arrested. The instant she regained her consciousness she felt assured that the veil had not been removed from her face; and this was an immediate relief to her mind. But her meditations were still of a very painful character. She had no difficulty in surmising that the Marchioness of Mirano had suddenly stricken a grand blow, in the hope of crushing the perils which environed her and ensuring the safety of her position. Ciprina likewise thought it more than probable that the wrong person had been arrested as her companion, and that Charles De Vere was now in the place which it had been intended that Edgar Marcellin should occupy—unless indeed, on the other hand, it was actually purposed to deal thus with young De Vere and to adopt some *other* course with reference to Edgar. Ciprina knew not what to think upon these points; and the longer she reflected upon them the more bewildering did they become. At all events—however the matter might really stand—it was impossible that she could be otherwise than full of apprehension in reference to Marcellin. She remembered how she had left him wrapped in a profound sleep, under the influence of La Dolfin's soporific medicament; and it was with excruciating feelings she thought within herself, "When he awakes, he may be made to believe that I have abandoned him, or that I have been guilty of some foul treachery towards him; for that vile Lucrezia is capable of telling him any falsehood!"

While Charles De Vere on the one hand remained plunged in profound silence—and while Ciprina on the other hand was becoming more and more entangled and bewildered by her painful reflections—the postchaise continued its way. To Charles De Vere it was a matter of the completest indifference to study the route which the equipage was taking, because he was utterly unacquainted alike with Florence and its environs. As for Ciprina, she had satisfied herself by a glance that she was ignorant of the way that was being pursued; and therefore she had bestowed no further attention on this point. As for the two *sbirri*, they were buried in a silence as profound as that in which their prisoners were now wrapped; but their eyes were wide open, and not for a single instant did either of them seem inclined to suffer the keenness of vigilance to be subdued by any sensation of drowsiness.

Our young hero was on his side maintaining a strict watch upon the men by whom he himself was so closely watched. The officer kept his pistol in his hand: the weapon lay across his knees. Charles knew that it was cocked; and he had little doubt that it was loaded. The officer had another pistol about his person; while his companion-*sbirro* possessed a carbine, which he held between his knees, with the muzzle pointing straight up towards the roof of the chaise. Then,

too, there was another police-official, upon the box; and he was armed with a carbine and a sword. Did Charles De Vere contemplate any resistance against such fearful odds?—or did he purpose to make any direct attack upon these well-armed men? In short, was he meditating how to secure his escape and that of his female companion?—and was he settling in his mind the best means of carrying such a project into execution? We shall see.

Upwards of an hour had elapsed since the postchaise had rolled out of the city of Florence, and a halt was now made for the purpose of changing horses. This was at a post-house which stood completely isolated by the roadside: there was no tavern attached—and the police-officials did not quit their seats. In a few minutes the postchaise was continuing its way; and the moon, now bursting forth, showed Charles, as he glanced from the window, that the road was winding amidst eminences rising into a distant background of lofty heights; so that it now for the first time struck him that the route which was being pursued led into the midst of the Apennine mountains. He knew that the Tuscan Government maintained, amidst these wilds, two or three strong fortresses, to which political offenders were consigned, and which likewise opened their gates to receive any individuals who might chance to become obnoxious to high and influential personages. A mind so sagacious as that of De Vere, was not therefore long in coming to some such conclusions as the following:—

"My fellow-prisoner and myself have been assured that our lives are not in danger. It is therefore our liberties which are at stake. Imprisonment is intended; and it is one of the Apennine fortresses to which we are being conducted. As well be enclosed in a sepulchre at once! Ah, my poor mother!—Ah, dearest, dearest Agnes!—But by heaven, this shall not be!"

The beloved images which were thus suddenly conjured up in his mind, nerved him with an almost preterhuman fortitude, and with the strongest resolution to attempt the execution of a plan which he had been revolving in his mind. He indeed felt that his position was a desperate one; and he said to himself, "I must risk everything! It is doubtless that detestable woman, the Marchioness di Mirano, who has caused me and this unfortunate lady here, to be thus suddenly arrested; and in order that *her* safety may be ensured, *our* imprisonment must be eternal! Oh! let me therefore risk everything," he emphatically repeated within his own mind, "rather than once suffer the doors of a Tuscan dungeon to close upon me!"

The chaise was still pursuing its way, and a profound silence reigned within. The moonlight penetrated into the interior, so that everything was plainly visible; and Charles had no fear of being able to measure his operations with the most perfect keenness and accuracy of vision. Presently he drew forth his kerchief; and, as if quite accidentally, he let it fall from his hand. He stooped quickly to pick it up: his hand instantaneously caught the lock of the carbine which the subordinate *sbirro* held between his knees, the butt resting on the floor of the chaise. All in a moment there was an explosion: the carbine had

gone off! The man started—Ciprina shrieked—the chaise was filled with smoke—and De Vere was not inactive! Quick as the eye can wink, had he taken advantage of the confusion to seize upon the pistol which the officer opposite to him had all the while retained in his grasp. That pistol was torn from the *sbirro's* clutch; and Charles hesitated not to deal him a blow so severe as to display little consideration whether it merely stunned or killed outright. Then, with the swiftness of thought itself, our young hero dealt a similar blow at the man with the carbine; and at the same instant, he with a tremendous back kick of his foot sent the door of the chaise bursting open. The postilion had instantaneously reined in his horses at the sound of the carbine's explosion: the equipage came to a full stop; and the *sbirro* leapt down from the box. He had instinctively grasped his carbine; but he did not immediately prepare himself for any hostile incidents: the idea had naturally struck him that one of his comrades inside the chaise had suddenly found it necessary to inflict the extreme punishment upon an intractable and rebellious prisoner. This third *sbirro* was therefore taken off his guard, when immediately on springing down from the box, as the chaise stopped, he was literally pounced upon by our intrepid young hero, who at that instant leapt forth from the interior of the vehicle. An ejaculation burst from the *sbirro's* lips: Charles felled him with a blow; but as the man did not lose his consciousness, De Vere tore the carbine from his grasp, and planted his foot upon his breast, exclaiming, "Resist not, or your life is forfeit!"

"You are the conqueror, signor, and you must dictate your terms," was the response.

At that very instant the postilion suddenly whipped his horses, and the equipage dashed away at the fleetest possible rate. Whether it were that the man was labouring under a panic terror, and was bewildered with the dread alarm that the intrepid Charles would inflict some frightful vengeance upon himself—or whether it were that he thought he had better help to at least carry off the other two officials, as well as the female captive in the chaise—we cannot possibly determine. But very certain it was that away went the equipage at a pace so swift as to be only too well calculated to astonish the horses who were so urged onward, as well as the driver who was thus successfully urging them.

"Stop!" shouted Charles; "stop," he ejaculated: "or by heaven, I will fire!"

But the postilion heeded not his threat; and indeed it was impossible for our hero to carry it into execution—as the whole body of the vehicle, with the persons whom it contained, was now interposed betwixt himself whom it was leaving behind, and the postilion who was seated on one of the horses that were dashing away with it. Feeling that his honour was more or less concerned in doing all he could to effect the liberation of Ciprina—who he looked upon as suffering entirely on account of a generous though somewhat immoral devotion towards Edgar Marcellin—the youth sped after the chaise as quickly as his legs would carry him—a carbine in one hand, a pistol in the other. Lithe and agile as he was, he dashed onward at a tremendous rate; but it was of course all in vain

—for the equipage distanced him more and more every instant, until at length it was lost to his view in a turning of the road some three quarters of a mile ahead. Then panting for breath, and temporarily exhausted by the tremendous efforts he had made to overtake the chaise, De Vere sank down upon a grassy slope by the side of the road,—thanking heaven for his own release, and deploring the fact that his exploit should have half-failed through the non-rescue of Ciprina.

He recked but little for the *sbirro* whom he had left at a distance behind: he had deprived him of his fire-arms; and though the individual still retained his sword, yet this was a matter of no consequence in the youth's estimation.

"If he come after me," thought Charles, "I am more than his match: for I need not let him approach nearer than I think fit. But it is not at all probable he will risk an encounter!"

And now, which way was De Vere to pursue? If he began to retrace the route which had been hitherto taken, he might incur dangers from the fact of the *sbirro* who remained behind, hastening before him to spread the alarm. If he struck off abruptly to the right or to the left, he might so completely lose his way as to wander about within the same limit, and thus become a prey to the troops of mounted police that he had no doubt would be speedily despatched in search of him. Yet something must be done!—it was not by tarrying on that spot where he now found himself, that his ultimate safety could be ensured! He therefore decided upon proceeding at random; and he at once struck into the defiles of the Apennines. The moon and stars were now shining brilliantly—the night was beautifully clear—and thus our young hero was enabled to pick his way amidst the wilds where he found himself. He beheld an occasional lonely cottage; but he dared not tarry to knock the inmates up and ask for shelter, because he still had the apprehension floating in his mind that the whole district would be speedily swept by the mounted police.

A couple of hours passed, and Charles De Vere was still wandering at random, without having encountered a soul, and without having as yet found an opportunity of putting into execution a project which he had formed. This was to procure a horse as soon as he possibly might. It was at the expiration of these two hours that our hero found himself on the outskirts of one of those picturesque little villages which are buried as it were amidst the mazes of the Apennines, and which the wayfarer stumbles upon so unexpectedly that he becomes aware of the fact all in a moment instead of having been prepared by previous glimpses gradually and gradually enlarging and developing the view. It was now between three and four o'clock in the morning—but all was still silent in that village. Charles entered it with mingled hope and misgiving—resolving to incur every risk for the purpose of possessing himself of a horse, but on the other hand recoiling from the apprehension that the circumstances in which he seemed to be placed might be deemed sufficiently suspicious to lead to his arrest. However, there was no help for it: a horse he must have, together with instructions how to escape beyond the Tuscan frontier, to the nearest point in a neighbouring State, whence he might at once communicate with

the British Ambassador at Florence and duly notify all that had occurred.

Charles entered the village; and he looked about for a tavern to which stables might be attached—or for a farm homestead—or even for the Government posthouse itself as a last resource. But it was the first of these which arrested his view,—an inn of decent appearance, with a promising sign proclaiming “accommodation for man and beast,” and with stables adjoining. Charles rang the bell; but several minutes elapsed before his summons was answered. Then an upper window was opened; and a middle-aged man thrust forth his head, demanding who was there?

“An English traveller,” replied Charles, “who by a variety of circumstances has been deprived of his mode of conveyance, and who has lost his way——”

“Ah!” ejaculated the landlord—for such the individual was: “another tale of the robbers, I’ll be bound! Wait a moment, good sir—and you shall be admitted.”

Charles De Vere had not thrown away his firearms; for with the prospect of eternal imprisonment before him if he were captured, he had resolved to resist as long as possible in case of an attack, and provided that he felt himself justified in running the chance. But he had secured his carbine and pistol under his upper coat, which he buttoned across his chest. He had already determined to tell some tale of robbers in order to account for the predicament in which he was placed; and the words spoken by the landlord seemed at once to show him that this would be the very best excuse he could devise. The front door of the inn opened; and the landlord, having huddled on a portion of his apparel, made his appearance, inviting Charles to enter.

“There’s a bed-chamber all ready, signor—with nice clean sheets, aired and put on yesterday; and the kitchen fire is now being lighted—so that if you choose to have any refreshment brought up——”

“My good man,” interrupted Charles, “I cannot tarry to partake of your hospitality, for I am compelled to journey on as fast as I may be able;—and therefore, to come to the point at once, have you a horse to sell or to let on hire?—and in either case, the price shall be of your own settling.”

“A horse, signor? Yes—to be sure——and as good an animal—surefooted and fleet—as ever you could wish to set eyes upon. But the price—the price, signor,” he added slowly, as he deliberately surveyed our hero from head to foot,—“the price, signor, is a heavy one——”

“No matter!” ejaculated Charles, delighted at the prospect of at once obtaining the means of placing himself beyond the reach of danger.

“Well, signor, if you don’t mind about the price,” resumed the landlord, “the horse is yours. I suppose you are journeying towards Florence——”

“Florence? No—not exactly. In fact,” continued our hero, “I was going in just the opposite direction. The neighbouring State—it is really of little consequence to me whether I first reach the Duchy of Lucca or the Roman dominions—I am only travelling for amusement——”

“Oh, well,” said the landlord; “then if that’s the case, it must be a matter of indifference which road you take, signor. As for the horse, it’s close at hand——But excuse me, signor—the bargain is ready cash, you know?”

“I fully meant it!” ejaculated Charles; and eager to convince the man that he possessed the means of completing the purchase, he thrust his hand into his trousers’ pocket, but without unbuttoning his coat, so that he lifted up a skirt for the purpose. “Here!” he exclaimed, displaying his purses, which was well filled with coin: “you can no longer doubt——”

“Doubt, signor?” ejaculated the landlord. “I never for a moment doubted that I had to do with a gentleman. Please to step this way, signor. The hostler is doubtless up by this time—it’s getting on for four o’clock—and the horse-post stops here to change soon after four.”

The landlord led the way into the kitchen, where a woman of about his own age was lighting the fire; and he said, “This is my wife, signor, who will make you a cup of coffee before you take your departure.”

“Thank you,” returned Charles, fearful that his conduct would look suspicious if he declined the proffer.

“This way, signor—this way, to the stable!” said the landlord, proceeding towards a side door. “Dear me! how stupid! Where is the key, wife?”

“Here,” responded the woman, taking a key from the mantel.

As her husband received it from her hand, he hastily whispered something in her ear; and then sped with every possible display of the most officious politeness to throw open the door at which Charles was impatiently waiting. They passed into the stable-yard: an old hostler was just unfastening the door of some outhouse where provender was kept; but he now hastened to obey his master, who ordered him to bring out “the brown horse” from the stable. The animal was accordingly led forth; and though his appearance certainly promised but little to fulfil the high character which he had ere now received from his owner; yet Charles did not offer a single objection—he was only too glad to ensure the means of conveyance, as well as only too anxious to obtain prompt possession of it. The landlord made the old hostler parade the animal to and fro after the approved fashion of all jobbers in such cattle; and he kept expatiating on the merits of the brute until his eulogies began to pass the bounds of ludicrousness and to savour of the most barefaced cheating to which De Vere had ever been subjected. He was therefore chafing with mingled indignation and impatience; and yet he was so situated that he dared not betray either. At length he began to observe that the landlord kept throwing a hasty glance in the direction of the door opening from the kitchen; and now it all in a moment struck De Vere that the fellow was merely performing a part in order to gain time for the perpetration of some treachery. The youth felt that he was betrayed; and he resolved to make one last desperate effort for his escape.

“Bring the saddle!” he ejaculated—for the animal was already bridled. “Be quick with you, old man!” he added, thus speaking to the

hostler; "and here is something for your pains!"

The latter, greedily grasping the handsome fee which Charles slipped into his hand, sped to the stable and quickly reappeared with the saddle.

"Here, my good fellow!" said Charles, now addressing himself to the landlord: "here is my purse! What is the price you ask for that horse?"

"The price, signor?" responded the men, scratching his head and pretending to reflect, "Why, now I remember, it has not as yet been mentioned between us—and before I conclude the bargain I must go and consult my wife—"

"Very well! Be gone, and be quick!" cried our hero, who was heartily glad to get rid of him.

The landlord hurried into the kitchen; and Charles lost not a moment in putting on the saddle: the next instant he had caught up a stick which happened to lie conveniently near—and then in the twinkling of an eye he was on the back of the animal.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the landlord, rushing forth from the kitchen: "the bargain's not concluded! I will not sell the horse!—my wife won't part with him!"

"Ah! is it so!" ejaculated De Vere. "Then take this!"—and he flung the purse towards him.

"Stop, stop, thief! Help! help! Robbers! murderers! assassins! Fire!" shouted the landlord. "Stop! stop!"

But Charles was speeding away at a rate which the animal had not accomplished for a long time past, and to which it was urged by the belabouring that our hero bestowed on its sides with the stick serving him as a whip. The gate of the stable-yard opening into the street of the village, was shut; but at the opposite extremity there was only a little narrow ditch, or open sewer, separating it from the adjacent field. The ditch was crossed; and away the animal sped as if it had all in a moment conceived an affection for its new master, and entertained the instinctive idea that it must do its best to help him in an emergency that was only too perceptible.

The landlord hastily picked up the purse; and opening it, found that it contained enough coin in gold and silver to purchase half-a-dozen such horses at even the most extravagant prices which the most unconscionable individual could possibly put upon them.

"Why do you cry after the youth?" demanded the old hostler. "By all the saints! you are well paid, master!"

"But I have lost double as much!" exclaimed the landlord. "That fellow is one of the notorious robbers—one of the banditti!"

"Banditti?—Robbers?" echoed the hostler, now turning pale and trembling.

"To be sure!" vociferated the landlord: "the robbers on whose heads, each and all—collectively or individually—so immense a reward is placed!"

"What, so young a man—and evidently a foreigner too, by his accent and his dress?" interjected the hostler, with a doubt as to the accuracy of his master's statement.

"Yes, yes! I tell you I am positive! I saw a musket under his coat! Why the devil doesn't

my wife return? It may not yet be too late! I sent her off for the mounted police that came into village last night—Ah! here they are!"

And sure enough half-a-dozen *sbirri* on horseback appeared at the gate communicating with the street, just as the landlord gave vent to that concluding ejaculation. He rushed forward to open the gate; and pointing with his extended arm, he cried, "There! there!" thus indicating the direction which Charles De Vere had taken: but the youth was by this time concealed from the view in consequence of having passed the brow of an eminence and plunged into a deep valley which lay beyond.

The *sbirri*, whose special duty it was to scour the Apennine roads and extirpate the banditti which infested them, were mounted on steeds admirably adapted for the purpose by the blended qualities of fleetness and strength. Away they sped!—the little ditch was crossed in a moment—through the field they galloped—and on reaching the eminence, they sent forth a shout of triumph to inform the landlord that the fugitive was in view.

"You are a witness," exclaimed the landlord, rubbing his hands gleefully, as he turned to the old hostler, "that it was I who gave the information! Besides, my wife can prove it—and so the reward is certain to be mine!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE TWO FUGITIVES.

WE must now return to the postchaise, which we left at the moment when it was dashing off at the most rapid pace to which the driver could possibly urge his horses. The whole incident—or rather series of incidents connected with Charles De Vere's escape, had taken place with such startling rapidity, that Ciprina was overwhelmed with mingled bewilderment and alarm. First there was the explosion of the carbine, filling the chaise with smoke, and eliciting from her lips that scream which indicated her terror lest some one should have been killed by the weapon which was discharged, but which weapon it was she could not immediately perceive. Then, while the din of the report was yet vibrating in her ears, came the sounds of the heavy blows dealt in rapid succession upon the heads of the two *sbirri* by the pistol which De Vere had snatched from the hand of one of them. Almost at the same instant the door was dashed open with another startling din; and the next circumstance of which Ciprina became conscious, was the rushing forth of Charles himself, and his encounter with the police-official who had leapt down from the box. The next instant away sped the chaise; and Ciprina, who was on the very point of springing forth after De Vere, fell back in the seat, smitten with the cruel conviction that if he had succeeded in escaping she herself was still a prisoner.

The smoke quickly cleared away, as the speed with which the equipage dashed on caused a current of air to sweep through; and now the young lady flung looks of horrified suspense upon the two *sbirri*, lest they should present ghastly and

bloody objects to her view. But no blood met her eyes: they had been stunned by the blows—and the officer was beginning to recover. For an instant Ciprina thought of making one desperate attempt to save herself by springing out of the vehicle; for though the door had banged again, yet it could be reopened in a moment: but it was proceeding at a rate which made her abandon a design that could only have been followed by a fractured skull on the spot. Another idea however struck her: she thrust her head out of the window and called to the postilion to stop,—adding that the *sbirri* were murdered!

The postilion now drew in his horse at a distance of at least a mile from the spot where the previous adventure had taken place; and Ciprina, bursting open the door, was about to spring forth, when the officer recovered just sufficiently to seize her by the garments. Rendered desperate by a sense of her position, the young lady dealt him a blow with all her force; and tearing away from his clutch, she sprang into the road.

"Go to them!" she cried to the postilion: "they want you!—they are dying!"

Away she then sped, leaping a ditch and darting up an embankment as quickly as if bloodhounds were upon her track, or as if she were a deer flying from the pursuing dogs. She glanced over her shoulder: the officer of the *sbirri* was just descending from the chaise! On she went!—another look cast behind, and she saw that he was now speeding after her! Fear gave fresh impetus to her pace; and she plunged into a wood, so that the pursued and the pursuer were now lost to each other's view.

The trees stood sufficiently apart to enable Ciprina to continue her way without impediment, especially as there was no underwood thicket. She thought to herself that the officer would proceed straight through the grove as she herself was then doing: she therefore turned abruptly off to the right, and still continued her way. At length, utterly breathless, she sank down upon the damp grass, not daring as yet to congratulate herself on having effectually succeeded in evading pursuit, and still with her ideas too much bewildered and confused to be enabled to reflect what she should next do in case her escape might prove to be actually ensured. The moonlight, be it remembered, was still refulgent outside the grove; but within a semi-obscurity prevailed; for many of the trees that composed this wood, were of the hardy species which in the Apennines retain their foliage not merely to the very end of autumn, but far into the winter, or even all through it. She therefore thought the best thing she could do would be to remain concealed where she was for awhile; and this resolution she adopted. She listened in an agony of terror lest footsteps should draw nigh: but she heard none. Then she listened in the hope of hearing the sounds of the equipage rolling along the road in one direction or another, as an indication that the pursuit had been abandoned and that the *sbirri* were departing. But no such certainty could she obtain; and when an hour passed and everything continued quiet, she began to breathe more freely,—saying to herself, "The chaise must have gone, and I am too far from the road to have caught the rolling of the wheels or the trampling of the horses!"

She now felt herself so benumbed with the cold that she dared not remain stationary any longer. She therefore continued her way through the wood; and in a few minutes she emerged therefrom. It was now that she asked herself what she was to do—what course she was to adopt? She was bewildered how to reply to these questions. She dared not think of returning to Florence, even if she possessed the means of conveyance; and the idea which naturally struck her was therefore that she ought to get into some neighbouring State with the least possible delay. She went walking on at random, in the hope of coming to some town or village where she might tell a plausible tale and obtain a vehicle. In about half-an-hour she entered upon a main road; but whether it were that which the postchaise had previously been pursuing, she could not possibly tell—for her roamings had utterly bewildered all her ideas in respect to the geography of the district. Nevertheless she resolved to pursue this road at a venture, as the only probable means of reaching a place where a conveyance could be procured.

Nor was she disappointed; for at the expiration of about twenty minutes she beheld the spire of a church peeping above the trees, its vane glittering in the moonlight. Five minutes more, and she entered a tolerable sized village. She now advanced cautiously, resolving to divert her footsteps in a moment if she should happen to catch a glimpse of a postchaise at all resembling the one from which she had escaped nearly two hours previously. The village evidently consisted of only one principal street, formed by the road itself; and no equipage of any kind was anywhere drawn up. She now looked out for an inn; and she soon discovered one. Before she approached the door, she was careful to fling a glance into the adjoining yard to see if the postchaise happened to be there: but nothing of the sort met her view. Then she mustered up all her courage and rang at the bell. In three or four minutes Ciprina heard footsteps moving inside: the door was opened—and a good-tempered, stout, matronly female, whose humour seemed by no means ruffled at having been aroused at such an unseemly hour, made her appearance. Ciprina had already thrown back her veil; and her beautiful face as well as her youthful aspect at once tended to enlist the sympathy of the landlady of the little establishment—for such the woman was.

"Blessed saints!" she cried; "signora, is it possible that such as you can be out all alone at this time of the night—or rather morning—and on foot too! But pray walk in. Goodness! what can have happened?"

Ciprina was delighted to find that she had encountered so good-tempered a hostess; and she at once entered the inn.

"Come to the kitchen, my dear young lady," exclaimed the woman. "The embers cannot be all extinct—for we were up late—and besides, a good faggot will soon make a blaze."

And a blazing fire there assuredly was within the space of a very few minutes on the hearth of that kitchen. Then the good dame put water to boil; and she began preparing her coffee-pot, giving vent all the while to ejaculations of wonder in respect to what might be the cause of the young lady being abroad and alone at such



an hour. The idea of robbers was invariably associated with the Apennine mountains; and thus the reader must not be surprised if Ciprina began to tell the landlady of this establishment a tale pretty similar to that which at the same time, and at another place, Charles De Vere was telling the landlord of a similar village-hostelry. But then there was this difference between the two cases,—that the worthy hostess implicitly believed all that Ciprina was saying, whereas on the contrary the host of the other establishment fancied that he had the best possible reason to suspect the truth of our hero's narrative.

"Blessed saints!" ejaculated the woman, holding up her hands, after she had poured out a steaming cup of coffee which Ciprina began gratefully to imbibe: "only think that you should have escaped with your life and your purse, after seeing

two lacqueys killed before your eyes and your two lady's-maids fainting outright! But when I spoke of your purse, signora, it was not that I cared whether you had any money or not to pay me for what little attentions I may show; for believe me, it would have been all the same if you had come in a much worse plight. And now, what can I do for you?"

"Is it possible to obtain a means of conveyance?" asked Ciprina eagerly.

"Oh, yes, signora," was the response. "I have a very nice one—a shut-up vehicle; and though there is only one horse——"

"Never mind!" interjected Ciprina. "Pray issue orders to have the equipage got ready at once. And without giving offence let me add," she continued, producing her purse, "that your kindness shall be well rewarded."

"Oh, not a syllable on that score! But I must go and rouse that lazy hostler of mine; for, as I told you, signora, we were all up very late—"

The hostess must have concluded her speech in the passage, if she finished it at all; for she was now bustling out of the kitchen and was closing the door behind her. Ciprina was overjoyed to think that everything was thus progressing so favourably: she was warmed by the fire and the coffee—she dried her feet, which had been wet with the heavy dew—she was now cheered and her spirits were elevated. In a few minutes the landlady returned, with the intimation that it was all right, and the vehicle would be round at the front door by the time the signora had taken another cup of coffee.

"But, by the bye," she said, "which road are you going?"

"In which direction does this road lead?" inquired the young lady, who was utterly ignorant on the point.

"Why, in one direction to Florence," was the answer: "and in the other to Bagno."

"And how far off is Bagno?" inquired Ciprina.

"Oh! upwards of thirty miles," returned the hostess.

"And from Bagno into the Roman States, how far?" asked Ciprina.

"Not above ten miles to the nearest point across the frontier," was the response.

"That will do," said the young lady, after having appeared to reflect for a few moments, though in reality her mind was made up on the instant. "Yes—I will proceed to Bagno."

The worthy hostess was either completely credulous, or at all events she chose to seem so; and in a few minutes the vehicle drove round to the front of the inn. Ciprina forced a very liberal sum upon the landlady in payment of her attentions, and likewise for the hire of the equipage; and so far as she could judge, the horses seemed fully competent to do its work at a quick rate. The chaise was an old-fashioned concern; but it was comfortable enough; and Ciprina, taking her seat, bade the woman farewell. On went the equipage; and for about half-an-hour it pursued its way along the broad even road amidst the argentine splendour which prevailed. All of a sudden, at the expiration of that brief interval, Ciprina's ear caught the sounds of a galloping steed's hoofs; and a horseman quickly appeared in sight. He was coming up a lane which diverged at right angles from the road; and he was labouring his animal with every appearance of the most remorseless violence. But what was Ciprina's amazement when at a second glance she recognised her late travelling-companion, Charles De Vere!

Instantaneously throwing herself back in the vehicle, she pulled the veil over her countenance, and drew her ample cloak still more closely around her form. Then she was on the very point of crying out to Charles, that she might ascertain the cause of his furious riding—whether danger were at hand, and if so, of what nature it was—when all in a moment the animal which our hero bestrode stumbled and fell. De Vere was thrown off; but he was instantaneously on his feet again; and without paying any heed to the passing post-

chaise, he endeavoured to make the fallen steed rise up. But the blood was now flowing from the horse's mouth; and it was therefore only too plain that its last work was done—and perhaps the closing achievement of its useful career was not the least exciting nor memorable in its brute existence.

An ejaculation of despair burst from the youth's lips, as he flung anxious glances behind him down the lane. But Ah! did he hear aright?—was some one calling him by name?

"Mr. De Vere! Mr. De Vere!" said the voice, which though somewhat altered from that in which Ciprina was accustomed to speak—or though, in other words, it was a feigned voice—yet was it full of soft music.

At the same instant the young lady thrust forth her head from the window of the vehicle, and called to the driver to stop. An exclamation of mingled surprise and joy now expressed the feeling with which Charles was inspired on beholding that veiled lady; for a glance showed him that she was alone—and he therefore naturally concluded on the instant that she had succeeded in escaping as well as he himself had ere now done. To rush forward—to open the door of the vehicle—to spring up inside—all this was the work of a moment; and thrusting his head from the window, he ejaculated to the driver, "On, on at the height of your speed! there are robbers close at hand!"

It only required this intimation to induce the driver to lash the steed into the fleetest gallop which it was capable of accomplishing; and as the horse was really a good one, the vehicle sped along at a tremendous rate.

"Robbers?" ejaculated Ciprina, "you do not mean—"

"Robbers in one sense if not in another," cried Charles quickly,—"men who would rob us of our liberty!"

"But is there any immediate danger? You were flying—"

"From the mounted *sbirri*!" responded Charles. "The poor brute which you saw sink down under me, performed wonders—miracles—prodigies! For half-an-hour I distanced them—"

"Just heaven!" exclaimed Ciprina: "then they are upon our track—"

"Yes!—perdition take them!" interrupted De Vere, who had just peeped forth from the window. "They are coming along in the same direction! I was in hopes they would be thrown off the scent!"

"What chance have we of escape?" asked Ciprina, who thus beheld all the heaven of her hopes suddenly darkened with the blackest clouds.

"No chance but the fleetness of this horse!" rejoined Charles. "And after all, it is ridiculous to suppose for a single moment that we can outstrip them! Ah, signora! I am now perhaps bringing destruction upon you—"

"Do these *sbirri* know us?" demanded the young lady quickly: "are they aware—"

"I scarcely can tell what they know or what they conjecture," exclaimed Charles. "They pursued me all of a sudden—I had fire-arms—the carbine and the pistol which I took from those officers—"

"Well, well?" ejaculated Ciprina impatiently. "And those weapons?"

"I have them no longer. When hard pressed some ten minutes back, at the commencement of that very lane from which you saw me emerge, I turned and for a moment made head against my enemies. I thought I might beat them back—or I might terrify them—and I discharged my firearms. The plan seemed to succeed—the fellows stopped—and on I rushed. But I had no ammunition for my weapons—they were therefore an encumbrance—and I threw them away."

"Look and see again where the pursuers are?" said Ciprina, a prey to the most feverish anxiety and torturing suspense.

"Good heaven! they are close upon us!" ejaculated Charles; "and whatever they may think or know, you, unfortunate lady, are now only too sure to be compromised by me! What can I do? I will spring forth!—I will lead them a chase across the fields—through the woods!—and you will pursue your journey in safety!"

With these wildly spoken ejaculations, Charles De Vere flung open the door of the chaise, and sprang forth, reckless of the frightful peril he incurred on account of the rapid rate at which the equipage was proceeding. He alighted on the grassy slope of a bank by the side of the road; but he was almost stunned by the violence of the concussion; and the few moments he thus lost were irretrievable. Scarcely had he regained his feet, when the *sbirri* were upon the spot. He was surrounded—drawn outlaws menaced him—resistance was utterly vain—and he was compelled to acknowledge himself a prisoner.

A couple of the mounted police-officers now galloped forward to see who might be travelling in the postchaise that had evidently some few minutes rendered its services to the fugitive, and which (they naturally thought) would not have been abandoned unless he had seen that he could not hope to accomplish his escape by means of that equipage.

"Stop!" exclaimed the *sbirri* to the postilion—and the man stopped accordingly: for he now perceived that instead of the horsemen being robbers, as he had at first concluded from Charles De Vere's exclamation, they were the officers of the law.

Ciprina had already seen from the carriage-window that Charles was captured; and when she beheld the two *sbirri* ride after the equipage, she gave herself up for lost.

"Who is this lady?" demanded one of the officials, the instant he had thrown a glance into the vehicle.

"I am travelling for my recreation," Ciprina hastened to answer, thus anticipating whatsoever reply might have been given by the driver to whom the question was put. "I perceive why you ask me—but the matter is easy of explanation. I saw that gentleman's horse fall under him—he begged me to give him a seat in the chaise—he told some tale of robbers, and I believed him. If it be not true—or if there be any reason why I should not have succoured him—I am exceedingly sorry."

"But who are you, signora?" inquired the foremost of the two *sbirri*. "Where do you come from? Whither are you going? Be pleased to produce your passport."

At this terrible demand, to which the unfortunate lady was utterly unable to give a satis-

factory response, she was seized with a violent trembling; and if the *sbirri* could have with their looks penetrated beneath her veil, they would have seen that her countenance was of a ghastly pallor.

"Come, signora, you had better answer the question!" exclaimed the officer who had previously been speaking; "for I can tell you that we already think there is something suspicious and strange in the proceeding—and not the less on account of the pertinacity with which you keep that veil over your countenance."

"I will tell you the truth!" exclaimed Ciprina, now terribly agitated. "I was travelling a little while back in quite a different style—I was attacked by robbers—they took from me my passport—purse—everything—"

"And where did this happen?" demanded one of the *sbirri*.

"Ah! I forgot the name of the town which I had last left—but I was coming from Florence—"

"And pray, after having been attacked by robbers," demanded the *sbirro* with an incredulous sneer, "how came you to admit into your chaise one of the chiefs of the very banditti by whom you had been despoiled?"

At this moment one of the *sbirri* who had Charles De Vere in their custody, called out to his two companions at the carriage-door, exclaiming, "After all, I really think there is some mistake here! The young gentleman seems to be different from what we thought—"

"He will have some difficulty in making me believe it," said the *sbirro* who had just been questioning Ciprina in such sharp terms. "Bring him this way; for I do not mean to let the chaise continue its course until I am convinced that things are a little more satisfactory than they now appear."

Our young hero was accordingly escorted to the spot where the vehicle had halted; and then one of the *sbirri* who had him in custody, said, "The young gentleman has shown us his card; and if it is to be relied upon, he is an Englishman, attached to the British embassy at Naples—"

"He may have stolen the cards from the pocket of some murdered or pillaged traveller," exclaimed the incredulous *sbirro*.

"But he has got a letter," continued the official who was better disposed in De Vere's favour, "addressed to just the same name that there is upon the cards—"

"Well then, perhaps the young gentleman will have the kindness to show us his passport—to tell us why he galloped away like a felon—how he came with a carbine in addition to a pistol—"

At this moment the hasty trampling of a horse's hoofs attracted the attention of the entire party assembled on the spot where this scene was taking place; and another *sbirro* was seen advancing along the road. As he drew nigh, a tightness seized upon our young hero's heart and he felt assured that all was lost; for in the approaching horseman he recognised the very identical police-official who had ridden on the box of the other postchaise, and whom he had vanquished and disarmed of his carbine!

"Ah, by the saints!" ejaculated the horseman, as he galloped up to the spot: "my last pri-

soner! And the lady-captive too, by all that is fortunate!" he added, as his look travelled with lightning rapidity from the countenance of Charles in the midst of the *sbirri*, to the veiled and cloaked form of Ciprina inside the vehicle.

A subdued moan indicated the despair of the young lady as she sank back in the chaise; while Charles De Vere knew not how to make another effort of any kind to save himself and Ciprina. Hasty explanations took place between the newly arrived *sbirro* and the officials who were previously on the spot—the result of which was that Charles in a few minutes found himself again seated by Ciprina's side in the chaise.

"To which place were you proceeding with the lady?" inquired one of the *sbirri* of the driver of the vehicle.

"I was going to take her to the next town, on the way to Bagno!"

"Ah, Bagno!" ejaculated the official—whose arrival had so utterly defeated the last chance that remained for the unfortunate fugitives. "And did the signora say that she meant to proceed as far as Bagno?"

"Yes—and farther on still—into the Roman States, I believe," was the response.

"Ah, well! she will be so far gratified that she will presently see Bagno! And now drive on."

The chaise accordingly continued its way—the whole troop of *sbirri* keeping guard over it, some riding on one side and some on the other.

"Madam," said Charles, in a voice of the deepest affliction, "I must again repeat my sorrow that I should have become the cause of your recapture!"

We should observe that he spoke now, as he had all along done, in the French language to Ciprina; for it was that which she herself had adopted when first he met her in the ante-room of her own suite of apartments at the Mirano mansion.

"Pray, sir," she responded, still maintaining a certain disguise in her voice, and speaking in a low subdued tone,—"pray, sir, I beseech you, reproach not yourself! We are evidently the victims of stars the most unlucky that ever ruled the destiny of mortals! But what meant the significant accent and leer with which that ruffian *sbirro* alluded just now to Bagno?"

"Alas, madam," answered De Vere, "Bagno is one of the Apennine fortresses in which Tuscan prisoners are confined!"

"Heavens! And I who was rushing headlong into the lion's mouth!" ejaculated Ciprina. "But, good God! can our persecutors mean to imprison us for any length of time?"

"Ah, madam," interjected Charles, who from a generous feeling was naturally anxious to abstain from telling her the very worst,—"it is useless to waste time in speculation and conjecture. Let us talk of something else. There are certain explanations which you may possibly be enabled to give—"

"Oh! you mean to ask me," interrupted Ciprina, "whether I can tell you who is at the bottom of this odious proceeding. I have no doubt it was that vile woman, the living counterpart of that perished princess of infamous memory—"

"You mean the Marchioness of Mirano?" said

Charles. "Yes! I have heard that she exactly resembles all the known portraits of Lucrezia Borgia; and every circumstance now tends to prove that the resemblance is not merely confined to features and figure, but that the character is the same! Yee, madam, I had already conjectured—nay, more, I had felt convinced that the instigatrix of the outrage whereof we are the victims, was the Marchioness di Mirano! But how was it that at your mansion—beneath your roof—such an irruption of the myrmidons of the law could take place so unexpectedly and with such mysterious suddenness? Methinks I beheld the abrupt opening of a door in the midst of a wall where I had seen no traces of any door until that moment—Ah!" ejaculated Charles, as a light seemed to flash in unto his brain; "perhaps, after all, it was not I whom the police-officials purposed to arrest? It may have been M. Marcellin himself!"

"Yes—there can be no doubt," rejoined Ciprina, "that this idea on your part is the correct one. But I will tell you a little secret, Mr. De Vere—one that it is now no longer of any use to conceal—"

"And that secret?" demanded our young hero hastily.

"It was into the mansion of the Marchioness di Mirano that you were introduced last night!—it was within the walls of her palatial residence that we were both seized upon and carried off!"

Charles De Vere was confounded at this piece of intelligence; and for nearly a minute he sat speechless with the astonishment which had seized upon him.

"Good heavens! mystery is piled upon mystery!" he at length ejaculated. "You in the Mirano mansion! and yet not an accomplice in the odious treachery which has thus made me a prisoner, and which, whether intended for myself or another, is nevertheless burying me all the same to a fortress in the Apennines! And Edgar Marcellin too beneath that roof!—unless for any reason you deceived me—"

"No—I did not deceive you," responded Ciprina; "and under all circumstances I pardon you the insult conveyed by the imputation. Edgar Marcellin was beneath that roof—is perhaps there now—"

"And you, lady—who are you?" demanded Charles De Vere. "At least there ought to be no longer any mystery on your part towards me; but, on the contrary, if you be really the friend of Marcellin—if you be an enemy of the Marchioness of Mirano—"

"I am both!" interjected Ciprina. "I found an asylum with the Marchioness di Mirano—Edgar Marcellin loved me—"

"And is he really ill?" demanded our hero.

"He is wounded! The wretched Marchioness sought his life—and but for me he would have died! I deemed him safe in my suite of apartments—I considered myself so far safe likewise that Lucrezia di Mirano would never have recourse to any open violence; and as for entertaining an idea at all treacherous towards yourself, Mr. De Vere—Oh, no! I was incapable of it!—believe me, I was incapable of it! But I did desire to keep my amour with Edgar Marcellin unknown—"

"And what name bore you within the walls of the Mirano mansion?" asked De Vere. "Surely you may now tell me everything?—for I confess that there are so many, many mysteries, I feel myself bewildered, and I fain would catch a glimpse of light to guide me through so much uncertainty and darkness."

"At the Mirano mansion," replied the young lady, "I bore the name of Signora Ciprina. It is not probable that I shall ever enter that mansion again; and as for the name—the name——"

"Good heavens! can it be possible?"—ejaculated De Vere, as a suspicion suddenly struck him. "The tones of this voice!—yes! yes! they are evidently disguised! Madam, I adjure you—tell me——"

"I know not, sir, what idea may have struck you," answered Ciprina, in a cold voice that now sounded very different to the ears of Charles than but a few moments back he fancied it had seemed: "but if you imagine that you ever met me before last night, you are mistaken. And now, sir, worn out and exhausted with fatigue as I am, I would fain slumber for awhile."

Our hero accordingly held his peace; and a profound silence now prevailed within the vehicle. Ciprina lay back in her own corner: the veil was still thickly folded over her countenance; and as the dawn was not yet breaking, there was a certain degree of obscurity prevailing in the chaise, though the heavens themselves were brilliant with argentine lustre. Charles could not obtain the slightest glimpse of his companion's countenance: he was bewildered by the suspicion which had struck him a few minutes back, and which was diminished, but not altogether dispelled, by the different intonations of the voice. He fell into a profound reverie: but it would only be a tax upon our readers' patience to analyze the multitude of conflicting thoughts, ideas, and conjectures which now agitated the brain of our young hero.

Meanwhile the chaise continued its way, guarded by the posse of *sbirri*. At the expiration of about an hour a small posting-town was reached; and there, in front of the tavern where the cavalcade drew up, stood the very identical postchaise whence the captives had escaped some few hours previous! The two *sbirri* whom Charles De Vere had attacked and stunned inside that chaise, were partaking of refreshments at this hostelry: but they rushed forth the instant they learnt the welcome intelligence that the fugitives were recaptured.

The arrangements, as they at the outset existed in respect to the travelling, were now resumed. Charles and Ciprina were transferred to the postchaise—the two *sbirri* who were their custodians at the first were again placed opposite to them: but now, for better precaution's sake, a couple of *sbirri* rode with the equipage, one on each side, and both with pistols in their holsters, so that fire-arms might be clutched at an instant's warning.

When the equipage started, Charles De Vere made some casual observation in French to Ciprina: but the officer of the *sbirri* at once interposed.

"Prisoners, you will maintain a profound silence! If you, signor, violate my commands, I will have you bound hand and foot and a gag placed between your teeth. I have not forgot the blow you gave me with the butt-end of the pistol;

and you can't therefore expect that I should show you any indulgence."

The fellow had a tremendous bruise on his forehead: the other *sbirri* likewise bore the marks of the attack which Charles had made upon them; and both showed by the fierce vindictive expression of their countenances that they loomed for an opportunity to wreak their spite on the young Englishman. Charles saw this, and was resolved to avoid affording them, if possible, the occasion of seizing on any pretext to make him the victim of their petty tyranny.

The postchaise pursued its way at a tolerably rapid rate, for it was now drawn by four horses,—it evidently being the intention of the *sbirri* to get rid of their own responsibility by lodging the captives with the least possible delay in the fortress of Bagno. The morning presently began to dawn above the Apennine hills; and now Ciprina not merely drew the folds of her veil all the more closely over her countenance, but she likewise kept her face continually averted from Charles de Vere. Without appearing to be contemplating her with any degree of attention, he studied her height as well as he could, considering her sitting posture: he studied her form likewise as well as the muffling cloak would enable him. The suspicion grew stronger in his mind; but still he was far from arriving at a settled conviction on the point.

The equipage continued its way; the sun rose high above the hills in the distance; the travellers were now completely in the bosom of the Apennines. All objects were plainly visible; for the orb of day was rapidly putting forth all its lustre; and though it was at the beginning of the month of November, yet let our readers bear in mind that the grand luminary possesses in the Italian clime a power which at the close of Autumn he seems to have altogether renounced in respect to us dwellers in a more northern region. But though it was now broad daylight, yet still Charles De Vere was unable to obtain a single glimpse of the countenance of his female travelling-companion. She studiously averted her face; and she still kept the thick veil closed over it. The *sbirri* maintained a profound silence. They did not even speak to each other; and Charles had no inclination to draw down their ire upon himself by violating the mandate which had been so peremptorily given.

In this manner the equipage continued its way until at length a few straggling houses indicated the commencement of a town. Then a street of tolerably imposing appearance was entered; but the equipage suddenly turned abruptly thence, and pursued its course for some two hundred yards along a broad open road with no buildings on either side. The interior of the vehicle was suddenly darkened, or rather shaded into semi-obscurity; at the same time that the wheels rolled over an uneven stone pavement which jolted the chaise most horribly. It was an arched gateway through which the equipage was passing; so that the captives felt assured their destination was reached and that this was the fortress of Bagno.

The equipage stopped in a court-yard surrounded by gloomy walls: the door of the vehicle was opened, and the captives were ordered to alight. They were now conducted into a large lobby, or waiting-room, the entire aspect of which indicated the

strength of a prison whence it was next to an impossibility to escape against the will of the authorities of the place. The walls were of the most solid masonry, formed of huge blocks of stone: the pillars supporting the arched roof, were of great thickness: the doors had a massive appearance; and the windows were such mere loopholes that there was not a sufficiency of natural light in the place, and therefore an iron lamp suspended to the ceiling was burning. A sentinel with a loaded musket stood near each door; for there were three leading into different departments of the fortress.

It was into this lobby that Charles De Vere and Ciprina were conducted by the *shirri*. Ciprina walked first; and as she had been the first to descend from the vehicle, Charles had still failed to catch a glimpse of her countenance, even if the folds of the veil would permit it. But when once that lobby was entered, the unhappy young lady threw herself upon a stone bench; and the sounds of her deep sobbings smote the ears of her companion. He turned towards her to address some words of consolation, or say something reassuring, if possible: he then caught for a moment a glimpse of the profile of her countenance, and an ejaculation burst from his lips. Yes!—there was no longer a doubt!—his suspicion was confirmed!—it was Floribel whom circumstances had thus rendered the companion of his captivity!—Floribel Lister, the lost cousin of his beloved Agnes!

"Oh, be merciful! reproach me not!" she murmured, perceiving that the recognition which she had all along been so anxious to avoid, or at least to postpone, had taken place; and her sobbings were renewed with an increasing bitterness.

"My God! my God! Floribel! is it thus that we meet?" exclaimed Charles, as he was compelled to support her on the stone bench where she had thrown herself, for he feared lest she should fall headlong upon the pavement of the lobby.

"I feel as if I should faint," she murmured; and she threw off her cloak,—appearing now in the elegant dress which she wore beneath it.

"Sustain yourself, Floribel," said De Vere: "summon all your courage to your aid!—you will require it presently!"

"What mean you, Charles? what mean you?" she demanded, as if all in a moment goaded by poignant terror into a keen sense of life again.

"What horrors do you anticipate?"

"None, none," he hastily interjected,—"beyond immurement in dungeons within these walls!"

At this moment one of the doors was thrown open; and a middle-aged man, wearing the uniform of the highest grade of officers of the Tuscan police, made his appearance. He had decorations on his breast; and his sword, instead of hanging to a white leather belt over his shoulder, was suspended to his waist. Moreover the sentinels drew themselves up in an attitude of respect; so that the two prisoners were at once enabled to comprehend that this personage was a man of authority. And such he was; for he now proceeded to introduce himself to Charles as the Governor of the fortress.

"I have every reason to believe," De Vere at once said, "that I am the victim of some mistake—"

"The police never commit mistakes, signor,"

interrupted the Governor with a stern curtness. "Whoever comes to this fortress as a prisoner, is assuredly the right person."

"But yet, signor," exclaimed Charles, "you will at least grant me your attention?"

"I have no ears and no eyes for anything except for my duty," rejoined the Governor.

"But you have doubtless some document," cried Charles,—"*a warrant—a process-verbal—or some credential, containing the names—*"

"I have nothing to do with names," interrupted the Governor: "no prisoners have any names at Bagno. You will be Number Twenty-nine; your lady-companion Number Thirty."

"Oh, this is infamous!" exclaimed Charles; while a low moan came forth from the lips of the wretched young lady; for it naturally struck them both as being something horrible thus to destroy their identity, and render them nameless beings as if they were already numbered with the dead!

At that moment another of the three doors opened; and an individual dressed in the garb of a priest, made his appearance. He was evidently the chaplain of the fortress; for the Governor saluted him with becoming respect. Young and handsome was that ecclesiastic, with a pale intellectual face;—and now another ejaculation burst from the lips of Charles De Vere, as he recognised Father Falconara!

The recognition was mutual; and an expression of astonishment seized for a moment upon the countenance of the young priest on beholding Charles De Vere there, for he had just heard that two prisoners, a young gentleman and a young lady, had arrived at the fortress, and he could not therefore for an instant doubt that Charles was indeed a captive. The Governor turned quickly towards Father Falconara, ejaculating, "Then it appears you know this young man?"

"Yes—we have met before," responded the priest, as a deep shade came over his countenance: and at the same time he shook his head mournfully as he thought of all the dire circumstances which had been connected with the self-destroyed Ginevra and the executed Silvio.

"Well, holy father," said the Governor, "it will of course now and then happen that in the person of a prisoner either you or I may encounter an acquaintance or a friend whom we have known under different and even happier circumstances. But I need not remind your reverence that our duty is paramount above every other consideration."

"I know it," responded the young priest firmly; "and whatsoever my duty may be, rest assured that I shall fulfil it."

In the meantime Charles De Vere had hastily whispered to his lady-companion, "It is providence who has sent me a friend in the person of that ecclesiastic! Cheer up! despair not! Now that the means of communication with friends elsewhere are open to me, our captivity will be but short!"

"Let the prisoners be transferred to their respective cells," said the Governor of the fortress.

"I am not permitted to address you by name," said Father Falconara to Charles De Vere; "nor to shake you by the hand: but there is now and no decree which can prevent me from wishing,

as a Christian, that you were anywhere else rather than in such a place as this. I shall see you presently."

The young priest then turned abruptly away, while a couple of turnkeys who had in the meanwhile made their appearance, prepared to conduct Charles and Floribel to the cells that were respectively yawning for their reception. The Governor, imagining them to be lovers or paramours from some hastily whispered information which the officer of the *sbirri* had given him, expected to behold a pathetic scene,—the young gentleman and the young lady flying into each other's arms—the former breathing all possible consolations, the latter either frantic or fainting. But nothing of all this ensued; and the Governor was therefore surprised when Charles merely took Floribel's hand, and with a melancholy species of kindness, said something to her in a language which he (the Governor) could not understand.

"We are about to be separated, Floribel," said Charles: "and doubtless this is the moment of a heavy and severe trial for you, to be consigned to a prison-cell! But again I commend you to the support of all the courage which you may possibly be enabled to summon to your aid. There is every hope for me; and rest assured that even though I may possibly be released before you, yet the term of your captivity shall be brief!"

"All this, Charles," responded Floribel, in a tone full of emotion, "is infinitely more than I deserve at your hands. One word ere we separate! Is it true—is it really true—for the whisper has reached my ears,—is it true that Agnes believes—"

"Agnes believes that you have sought some deep seclusion—that you are penitent—that you are self-reformed—"

"Enough, Charles—enough!" interrupted Floribel. "For heaven's sake do not disabuse my beloved cousin of an idea—which—which—"

Floribel could say no more; but fervently pressing the hand of the generous-hearted Charles De Vere, she turned aside as if intimating to the turnkey who stood near that she was ready to follow him. At the same time our hero turned towards the other turnkey who was waiting; and the two prisoners were conducted by separate doors from the lobby.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRIEST AND THE CAPTIVE.

WE must take leave of Floribel Lister for the present, and follow in the footsteps of Charles De Vere. The turnkey led him along a stone corridor, the windows of which were very small, high up, and protected by iron bars. At the end of this passage there was a massive door, which the turnkey opened. It communicated with a small court-yard, surrounded by the lofty buildings belonging to that portion of the fortalice. On the opposite side there was an array of six doors, respectively numbered 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29. It was towards the door bearing the last-mentioned figures that the turnkey conducted our young hero, who now began to com-

prehend that the number which was to supersede a name in the identification or representation of himself, was most probably derived from the particular dungeon which he was destined to occupy. Nor was the conjecture erroneous; for the massive door now alluded to being opened, Charles was introduced into a cell which the turnkey informed him he was to occupy.

"And now," said the official, "perhaps you will offer no objection and make no difficulty in surrendering up whatever valuables, money, papers, and weapons, you may have about your person?"

"Here is my watch—and here are a couple of rings," said Charles,—“a bunch of keys likewise, if they enter into the category. Weapons I have none. As for my purse, I gave it some few hours back to a man of whom I purchased a horse.”

"I do not wish to perform my duty harshly," said the turnkey; "but you must permit me to assure myself that you have nothing else about your person. I must make a full report to the Governor. In plain terms, I must search you."

"Ah!" ejaculated Charles; and the colour mounted to his cheeks.

For an instant—but only for an instant—his thought of knocking the turnkey down, seizing his keys, and endeavouring to make an escape: but the next moment he abandoned an idea which a second glance showed him to be utterly preposterous.

"Ah! I forgot!" he said: "I have a letter about my person:"—and he thus alluded to the one which he had received from Agnes, and in consequence of which he had undertaken the journey from Naples to Florence.

"You are at liberty to destroy whatsoever papers you may have about you," responded the turnkey: "but you must not keep them: and if you do undertake to destroy them, you must do so at once and in my presence."

"And what if I refuse?" inquired De Vere.

"Then the papers will be taken from you by force—"

"Yes—that I comprehend," interrupted our hero: "but what will be the destination of those papers? What, for instance—"

"The papers would be at once destroyed by the governor, who would not even read them," rejoined the turnkey; "for it is taken for granted that if you possessed any papers of importance when you were arrested, they would have been taken from you—or that if on the other hand you were not searched at all, it was because the authorities cared not for any documents that you might have in your possession."

"Then why take from me, for the purpose of destruction, any papers that I have about me?"

"Because," answered the turnkey, "no prisoner is allowed to retain money as a means of bribery, nor to have papers as the means of correspondence: nor must he preserve anything about his person to establish his identity."

"I thank you for these explanations," replied De Vere. "As for this letter, therefore, I destroy it in your presence. See! it is done! This card-case must be surrendered up to you. And now, as you are so well disposed to be civil and conciliatory, I offer not the slightest resistance to whatsoever further search you may think it expedient to institute."

The turnkey thrust his hands into De Vere's pockets, but found about his person no articles in addition to those which had already been produced.

"I have now to inform you," said the official, "that the other five cells in this building are occupied, each containing a prisoner——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Charles: "who are the unfortunate beings?"

"To you," replied the turnkey, "they are Numbers 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28,—in the same way that you will only be spoken of to them as Number 29."

Our hero felt his blood run cold at being thus reminded in so forcible a manner of the complete loss of his identity within those walls; and scarcely even the hope which he had formed in consequence of encountering Father Falconara, could prevent him from sinking at that moment into despondency.

"I was about to inform you," continued the turnkey, "that as you are now six in number, the day will be divided into as many periods for the purposes of exercise. You will thus have the privilege of walking for two hours daily in that court-yard. It is almost unnecessary to warn you against seeking to communicate with any of the prisoners in the same compartment: but yet I may as well add that if by any possibility of accident, oversight, or hazard, there should seem to arise an opportunity for such communication, it were well for your own interest that you yielded not to the temptation. For if discovered, you would find to your cost that the Castle of Bagno possesses dungeons to the subterranean horrors of which this cell is a perfect paradise in comparison. And now one word more! There is a chaplain attached to the fortress. Ah! I remember—you saw him just now in the lobby. You are not compelled to receive the visits of his reverence against your inclination: but if it suit you to have a spiritual consoler, you can have none other than he."

"I shall be glad to receive his visits," replied Charles, inwardly hoping that it would not be very long ere Father Falconara crossed the threshold of his cell.

The turnkey now took his departure: but in a few minutes he returned, accompanied by a junior official, who brought our hero his breakfast. This consisted of a tin mug, or pot, containing about a pint of weak coffee, and a tolerably large piece of bread of inferior description, but by no means uneatable. When Charles was again alone, he sat down to partake of the food thus supplied him; for despite his mental anxiety, he felt the need of bodily refreshment.

The cell was about twelve feet square, of altorable height, and with a window placed high up, and so defended by a range of iron bars sloping up toward the ceiling, that no one, even if climbing up thereto, could obtain a prospect of whatsoever premises lay beyond. The furniture consisted of a bed, a table, a chair, and toilet apparatus. The walls had been recently whitewashed; and the place was cleanly enough. Charles thought of Floribel, and wondered how she was bearing up against her captivity: he sighed also as he reflected that in all the circumstances which had thrown them together, there were the proofs

only too plainly apparent that she was still leading an immoral and vicious life. Oh! if he regained his liberty, and if he succeeded in procuring her emancipation likewise, what measures must he adopt to guard her against a relapse into the ways of error? what saving treatment could he possibly apply to her? Must he send her back to the companionship of her pure and virtuous cousin? No!—this was not to be thought of! But what other influence would redeem her?

A couple of hours had elapsed since Charles first crossed the threshold of that cell, and he grew more and more impatient for the coming of Father Falconara. At length the massive bolts were drawn back—the huge key grated in the lock—the door was opened by the turnkey—and the young ecclesiastic was introduced.

"Return in half-an-hour," said Father Falconara to the gaol official.

The man accordingly departed, having previously refastened the door; for all the regulations of the prison-castle were carried out with the strictest regard to discipline.

Now that De Vere found himself alone with the priest, he made a movement as if to grasp him by the hand: he could even have embraced him as a friend whom Providence itself had reared up to succour him in the midst of his misfortunes! But to his surprise, and even to his dismay, Father Falconara drew back, and seemed anxious to avoid any unnecessarily close contact with the prisoner.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Charles, who suddenly fancied that he comprehended the cause of the young priest's coolness; "is it possible that a vindictive spite, or else a guilty terror has gone so far in respect to myself, as to malign and misrepresent me——"

"I have heard nothing to your discredit," interrupted Father Falconara. "No one has told me wherefore you have been brought hither, for the simple fact that nobody within these walls knows anything on the subject. Neither am I permitted to inquire."

"But you may hear my explanation?" exclaimed Charles eagerly.

"No," rejoined the young ecclesiastic. "I must not even give ear to your explanation."

"Good God!" cried Charles, his heart now sinking within him: "then it is utterly useless for me to have fallen in with you! I dare not even hope for the sympathy of friendship,—I who had looked forward to its succour!"

"I have already given you to understand," said the priest, "that though the duties which I have sworn to fulfil shall be accomplished to the very letter, yet that no earthly power can stifle the throbs of a Christian heart in sympathy with the unfortunate."

"Ah!" ejaculated Charles, his countenance becoming animated with delight; "now you speak in a strain which is welcome to my ears!"—and he rushed forward to seize the ecclesiastic's hand.

"No! no!—keep back!" said Father Falconara, in a tone so peremptory and even stern that again was our young hero transfixed with astonishment and dismay.

"Good God!" he once more cried: "you treat me thus—and yet you say that I have not been maligned in your hearing?"



SIGNORA BELLUNO.

"I dare show no signs of friendship to a captive," rejoined the priest. "I am bound by the most sacred of vows neither to grasp the hand of a prisoner nor break bread with him—nor demonstrate any human kindness or social amenity—unless under circumstances in which," added Father Falconara, "I hope that I shall not see you placed."

"And those circumstances?" demanded our hero.

"The circumstances of a doomed one about to go forth to die, and in his supreme hour receiving absolution together with the last sacraments at my hands!"

"Heaven alone can tell what fate my enemies may have in store for me," cried Charles; "and now that this last hope has abandoned me—"

"Speak not in my presence of any hope, save that which the devout Christian reposes in heaven."

No. 62.—AGNES.

"But what," exclaimed Charles, who was now alike indignant and disgusted at what he looked upon as the cold unnatural stoicism displayed by the young ecclesiastic and which he could not even conceive to be justified by whatsoever oaths and vows he might have taken,—“but what if I were to persist in telling you my tale—in forcing you to listen—in demanding your succour—in going upon my knees—Oh! what if I were to do all this, must you not hear me?—for during one half-hour you are as much a captive within the walls of this cell as I myself am!”

"If you were to act as you have threatened," rejoined Father Falconara, still with the same glacial calmness and icy self-possession as before, "I should never revisit you: my vows would prevent me."

Charles remained silent for upwards of a minute, wondering whether it could be possible that all the hope which he himself had cherished, and

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with which he had buoyed up Floribel ere they parted, could be lost. Suddenly he ejaculated, "Are you indeed that same Father Falconara whom I knew in Naples?"

"The same," replied the priest: and all this time his pale countenance was imperturbable.

"The same?" cried Charles. "I doubt it. If so, do you know me? do you remember me? Who am I?"

"Do not ask me," responded the ecclesiastic: "it is useless to put such a question."

"Nay—but I insist upon having the answer!" exclaimed our hero, now becoming most painfully excited. "Who am I?"

"You are Number Twenty-nine," was the priest's reply.

Our hero literally stamped his foot with rage for a moment; and then he really felt as if he could have wept, and as if tears were the only safeguard against his going mad. But he tranquillized himself—he curbed his impatience—he held back his tears; and looking Father Falconara full in the face, he asked, "Upon what topics are we permitted to converse?"

"Upon none relating to the cause of your arrest, if you know that cause—or to the supposed reason, if you only conjecture it,—upon nothing which in any way concerns the circumstance which brought you hither—"

"But if I were to touch upon it," interrupted Charles, "how would you be aware that I was approaching the forbidden ground, since you assure me that you yourself are ignorant of everything which relates to my most unjust—most iniquitous—"

"Hush! hush!" said the priest, in a peremptory tone: "you must not even complain of your captivity! You ask me upon what topics you can converse? I will tell you. You may touch on all these general subjects which by their very nature prove themselves to be unconnected with the circumstance of your captivity;—and you may, as a matter of course, consult me upon religious questions."

"Ah!" exclaimed Charles, with something like a feeling of relief: "then I see that our tongues are not entirely shackled, and that there are some subjects left for us to touch upon. Might I therefore ask what has become of the Count of Camerino?"

"I do not know," responded Father Falconara. "Since the 10th of January, at the commencement of the present year—"

"The 10th of January?" said Charles with a shudder: "the day of Viscount Silvio's execution?"

"The same," rejoined the ecclesiastic. "Since that hour of death and agony,—death for the son and agony for the father—but an hour likewise of contrition on the one side and forgiveness on the other,—since that hour, I say, I have not again beheld the Count of Camerino. We separated in the church where at the foot of the altar he breathed the syllables of pardon in the ears of the penitent son! As for myself, I left Naples—I could not endure to dwell any longer amidst scenes which were rendered so horribly familiar to my knowledge! And moreover," he continued, more slowly and deliberately, "I had committed a sin, for which I resolved that I would atone in some signal manner—"

"You! a sin?" said Charles in surprise.

"Yes. Did I not suffer the Count of Camerino to assume the disguise of a priest—to take my place in the confessional, and to learn from the lips of the guilty Ginevra—"

"Ah! true—true!" said our hero. "And for that sin, as you denominate it—"

"I am now paying the penalty," rejoined Father Falconara. "My position as chaplain in this fortress of Bagno is my penance! For two years am I doomed to bury myself in this seclusion—to pass my time in visiting what may be termed these living tombs,—yes, *this* is my penance!"

"I understand," said Charles, who was now inclined, in the natural generosity of his heart, to pity the unfortunate priest. "Perhaps I may be permitted to inform you that there is a young lady—"

"You must inform me of nothing," interrupted Father Falconara, "which may relate to Number Thirty, if you are about to allude to her. One prisoner is not allowed to speak to me of another, for fear lest I might become, even unconsciously and unwittingly, the means of communication between them."

Again Charles felt that an abrupt check was given to the discourse; and again he felt half inclined to be angry with the young priest at what he could scarcely help once more regarding as his cold, asturnine, unfriendly conduct which seemed as if it would not strain a single point in sympathy on his behalf. But all of a sudden Father Falconara seemed to adopt a more cheerful mood, as he took a seat upon the pallet, while he motioned for Charles De Vere to occupy the single chair of which the cell could boast.

"But I must tell you," continued the ecclesiastic, "that I am not altogether a captive within these walls. I am enabled as a matter of course to issue forth from the castle at any hour, even though it be in the middle of the night. I require no pass-word;—the moment I make my appearance at any one of the doors or gates of this fortress, my garb is sufficient to ensure me egress as well as ingress. And perhaps you will forgive me if I still continue in an egotistical strain: but there are times when one likes to speak of oneself—"

"Yes," said Charles, somewhat eagerly,—"when suddenly thrown into the company of an old acquaintance?"

"Well, then," continued Father Falconara, apparently unheeding the interjected observation, "I was about to inform you that so far as worldly comforts are concerned, I have no reason to complain. Indeed," he added meekly, and with a contrite look, "I am cared for better in these respects than I assuredly deserve, considering the great transgression for which I am doing penance. Do you happen to bear in mind the particular door by which you saw me enter the lobby this morning?"

"I do," answered De Vere.

"That door communicates with a staircase," continued the ecclesiastic, "at the summit of which there are two doors. The one to the right opens into two rooms which constitute my habitation. Picture to yourself a neatly furnished little parlour, with an equally comfortable bed-chamber adjoining. Ah, and I should add too that if I happen

to encounter a friend who is in distress, and whom I might legitimately assist without violating the vows which I took upon entering this fortress, I am not without the means. In that bed-chamber of which I have spoken, there is a curiously carved bureau of walnut-wood; and in one of the drawers there is a bag of coins—a sum of money, in short, which I do not want and can never use, and which I purpose to be some day or another devoted to a friendly aim. For do you not see, Number Twenty-nine, that if I did not choose to bestow that money as a gift—or if the person whose hands should grasp the bag, were too proud to receive the sum otherwise than as a loan—he might easily return it to me at his convenience on some future occasion?"

"Unquestionably! I comprehend all this," answered De Vere, wondering more and more why Father Falconara should be conversing in such a strain.

"Ah! I forgot to mention," proceeded the ecclesiastic, "that the door on the left hand at the top of that staircase, communicates with a suite of apartments occupied by Captain Belluno and his family."

"Captain Belluno?" said Charles inquiringly.

"Yes—the Governor of the castle," rejoined Father Falconara; "and therefore when ascending that staircase, I am always particularly careful to take the door to the right which opens into my own rooms, instead of that to the left which opens into the apartments occupied by the Governor, his wife, and daughter."

"No doubt," said Charles, in whose mind the suspicion began to flutter that the priest must have some motive in speaking to him on such subjects; for as he recollected everything which related to Father Falconara, he could think of naught that might justify the impression of frivolity in his character or mere gossiping garrulity in his habits.

"It sometimes happens," continued the priest, "that I am compelled to go forth from the castle at a late hour in the evening, to attend some sick person in the town, or to shrieve some dying sinner: for the minister of the place is well stricken in years, and I have considered it my duty to succour him to the utmost of my power. Thus you see that I have plenty of occupation on my hands, and I pass unquestioned in and out of the castle at will."

"You are fortunate," said our hero.

Father Falconara now rose from his seat upon the pallet; and gazing slowly round the cell, he said, "Yes—this must be the very same! I remember full well the incident connected herewith; for it happened during the first few weeks that I was chaplain to the castle."

"And what incident was that?" inquired De Vere.

"There was a prisoner here," continued the ecclesiastic, whose manner was that of one endeavouring to amuse with a friendly species of chat—"there was a prisoner here who made a desperate effort to escape—"

"Escape? Ah!" ejaculated our hero.

"Yes," returned the ecclesiastic, appearing not to notice the youth's sudden excitement: "he made an endeavour to escape. Truly, it was natural enough—but it failed."

"It failed?" repeated our hero. "Perhaps the measures were not well taken—"

"You shall see," responded the priest. "It appears that during the daytime he tore up some of his bedding into strips, and twisted them into strong cords. When the turnkey came the last thing in the evening, according to custom, the prisoner pounced upon him, overpowered him—stunned him, I believe, with a fierce blow—and possessed himself of the man's apparel. Then he bound him hand and foot, leaving him with a gag between his lips, unable to move a hand to withdraw it, even if he should very soon recover his senses. Dressed in the turnkey's clothing, and of course provided with his keys, the prisoner very nearly succeeded in effecting his escape from the castle: he even managed to pass through the lobby—but for want of the pass-word he was stopped at the outer gate—and then everything was discovered."

"Ah!" said Charles De Vere: "any one who has been for only a few hours in this fortress, knows enough of it to experience the ardent wish that the prisoner might have succeeded fully."

"Such is your opinion, Twenty-nine," said the priest, somewhat sternly: then immediately resuming his conversational mood, he said, "Only fancy if that prisoner had dealt with me, the chaplain, instead of with the turnkey! If he had put on my ecclesiastical dress and hurriedly passed through the lobby—holding his kerchief, we will suppose, up to his countenance as if labouring under some strong emotion—he would have escaped, because the pass-word would not have been demanded of him!"

"True! true!" ejaculated Charles, whose heart was palpitating in his breast. "But this stratagem could only have succeeded in the evening when it was dusk. And perhaps you are never accustomed to visit the prisoners' cells at such late hours?"

"Perhaps not," said Father Falconara coldly.

At this moment the bolts were heard to draw back—the key grated in the lock—and the turnkey made his appearance.

"Am I too soon for your reverence?" he inquired.

"No," replied the priest, with his accustomed calmness; and he issued forth from the cell.

The door was again closed and fastened; and Charles De Vere was once more alone. Strange wild thoughts were agitating within him: his mind was full of suspense;—that balancing between hope and fear was even fraught with the most painful sensations. What was he to think of the discourse which Father Falconara had held to him throughout the latter part of their interview? Was it mere conversational gossip?—or had it a purpose and a meaning? He reviewed it all with the utmost minuteness,—sentence for sentence—syllable for syllable—in all its details! Was it a series of hints and suggestions?—or was it pointless and aimless beyond the idea of amusing for a moment? His mind continued in a wild feverish flutter for some hours.

At about two o'clock the turnkey, with his attendant, reappeared; and this time it was to bring the captive his dinner. The fare was simple but wholesome, and served with cleanliness: it was also sufficient in quantity. Our hero however ate but

little; for his thoughts were still most suspensefully balanced betwixt hope and fear.

"And yet," he suddenly exclaimed, "what if everything must be regarded on the brighter side,—ought I to be unprepared? There can be no harm in making such preparation! I need not build entirely upon the realization of the hope; and thus, if it fail, I shall not be utterly crushed by disappointment!"

Having thus made up his mind to a particular course of action, Charles began to tear up some portion of his bedding; and he twisted the strips into the form of strong ropes. The task occupied an hour: he was full of excitement while it lasted—but when it was over, he was almost inclined to yield to despondency; for he thought to himself, "This priest, so conscientious—who showed himself so full of remorse for a transgression which surely under the circumstances was not so very great—will he now come forward, and stifling some scruples of conscience, assist me to regain my freedom? Heaven grant that it be so! If he return this evening, the matter will be placed beyond all doubt:—it may be regarded as a certainty!"

Slowly and wearily passed the time: the dusk began to close in—and then at about six o'clock the turnkey re-appeared. This time he came with an intimation that De Vere was at liberty to walk in the court-yard for a couple of hours. Our hero was on the point of availing himself of the offer, when the sudden thought struck him that the turnkey might during his absence examine the bedding, in which case he would detect under the coverlid the preparations that had been made. Charles was seated upon the pallet at the moment when the man entered; he declined the offer to walk in the court-yard—complained of being somewhat indisposed—and threw himself down upon the bed. The turnkey's assistant entered with a supply of coffee and dry bread, after the fashion of the morning's meal; and he placed a candle upon the table.

"In a couple of hours, I shall come," said the turnkey, "to take away the light. If you then feel that your indisposition increases, you may be visited by the medical attendant."

"Oh, it is nothing so serious as all that!" answered Charles: "it is only a sense of exhaustion arising from the fatigues of last night, which was not merely sleepless, but spent in all kinds of adventures."

The turnkey withdrew; and an hour passed away, during which our hero was hanging on the tenter-hooks of suspense. Would the priest come?—did he mean to come?—and if he had meant to do so, was anything now preventing him?—or was there after all nothing significant in the conversation which had seemed for a while to take so singular and promising a turn? A thousand times did Charles ask himself these questions during that hour. Still time wore on—no one came—the castle clock chimed half-past seven. Ah! if it were not all a delusion, the dream of hope must now be fulfilled! Yet still time was passing, and Father Falconara appeared not. The clock began to strike eight—and Charles felt his heart sinking within him.

The bolts were drawn back—the key grated in the lock—the door opened; and that heart which

an instant before seemed to be plunging down into the abyss of despair, now suddenly bounded with hopefulness when the form of the priest appeared upon the threshold. And how strange! No!—was it strange? or was it a sign—a good omen—a hint?—for the ecclesiastic carried his kerchief to his face!

"Your reverence seems to have a bad cold," said the turnkey.

"Yes," replied Father Falconara: "it has flown to my eyes. But my duties must be performed; and if Number Twenty-nine be really indisposed, it may possibly arise from mental perturbation, which needs my soothing offices."

"When shall I return, holy sir?" inquired the turnkey.

"In half-an-hour," rejoined the ecclesiastic. "Be not a minute later; for I have other duties to perform this evening, and which will take me outside the castle walls so soon as I shall have finished with the prisoner here."

The young priest entered—the turnkey closed, locked, and bolted the door—and now Charles was ready to spring forward and throw his arms about the neck of the ecclesiastic whom he already looked upon as his deliverer. His heart thrilled with the wildest joy, for he had no longer any doubt that the whole of that conversation in reference to the supposed circumstances of an escape, was intended as suggestive for his own special mode of action.

"I learnt that you were indisposed, Number Twenty-nine," said Father Falconara, with a calm unruflled countenance; "and therefore came to visit you."

"And I cannot do otherwise than express my sincerest—most fervid—most heartfelt gratitude," exclaimed Charles, "for the generosity—the——"

"Your language, Number Twenty-nine," interrupted Father Falconara, with a species of cold severity, "is enthusiastic beyond all rational or legitimate bounds. I must request that you do not address me in such terms—because it would really seem as if I had done you some favour or shown you some act of friendship beyond the limits of my duty——"

"Pardon me, holy father!" said Charles, who saw that the young priest's scruples must be studied and respected even to the very letter. "I perceive that I thanked you for something which after all you were bound to accomplish, and which may be considered within the scope of your duties."

"Yes—it is so," answered the ecclesiastic. "I will kneel down and pray by the side of this pallet: kneel you likewise if you will."

"Kneel, holy father," said Charles: "your example is one that must be followed."

The priest sank down upon his knees accordingly, and then De Vere sprang upon him—clutched his throat with both hands—and threw him completely down on the pavement of the cell, at the same time saying in a menacing tone, "Cry out or resist, and I will throttle you!"

But Father Falconara appeared to be in no condition either to raise an alarm with the tongue or defend himself with his hands: but he lay perfectly motionless—his eyes closed—his features rigid, as if he had fallen into a swoon. Yet the attack made upon him by Charles De Vere was

not *very* furious nor *very* ferocious, as the reader may easily suppose.

And now Charles lost no time in stripping Father Falconara of his ecclesiastical garb; and still the priest lay as motionless as if he were dead. Having disapparelled him of his upper clothing, our hero bound him hand and foot with the ropes which he had fashioned for the purpose; and he was careful to fasten his arms straight down to his sides, so that it became impossible for him to use his hands. This proceeding was all the more necessary—as no doubt our readers will agree with us in asserting—*inasmuch* as our hero's next measure of precaution was to thrust a gag into the priest's mouth, so as to prevent him from raising any untimely alarm when regaining his senses. Then Charles lifted Father Falconara into the bed, and threw the coverlid over him. The priest had dark hair, as had likewise our hero; and therefore it was unnecessary to cover up the ecclesiastic's head completely.

Matters having thus far progressed to the entire satisfaction of Charles De Vere, he proceeded to throw off his own upper clothing and assumed the ecclesiastical garb instead. Fortunately, he was just about the same height as the priest: both were of slender figures, and both had a graceful gentility in their gait. In respect to their countenances, Father Falconara was close shaven, while Charles De Vere was only a beardless youth of twenty; and thus, all things considered, it did not seem so very difficult a matter for our hero to play the part of the priest effectually and cheat the gael authorities with whom he might come in contact.

Beheld him now apparelled in the ecclesiastical garb, even to the cap; while in his hand he held the white kerchief with which Father Falconara was veiling his countenance when entering the cell. Charles glanced towards the couch: the priest lay perfectly still. Had he really fainted? or was he only simulating a swoon? For a moment De Vere was actually in doubt upon the subject; but the next instant he was satisfied as to the real truth—and he turned away from the pallet.

The castle clock chimed the half-hour; and now the key began to grate in the lock and the bolts were being drawn back. Charles re-approached the pallet, as if breathing some last words of consolation to the invalid captive whom the turnkey was to suppose to be lying in that bed: but as the door opened, the youth was careful to hold the white kerchief up to his countenance.

"Ah! Number Twenty-nine has retired to rest," said the turnkey. "It was the best thing he could do; and no doubt he will be quite well to-morrow."

The turnkey took up the candle from the table, and respectfully stood aside, while the supposed priest passed from the cell. Then the turnkey turned to bolt and lock the door, while Charles walked across the court-yard to the door communicating with the other part of the castle. He knew not exactly whether the turnkey who was locking up his cell, would be the one to open that other door, or whether a different official might be posted at it. But his doubt was soon solved; for he was quickly overtaken by the turnkey who had visited his cell, and who had extin-

guished the candle which he had taken thence. The evening was pitch dark, so that as the turnkey and Charles De Vere stood for a moment in the court-yard together, it was not even necessary for the latter to continue holding the white kerchief up to his countenance: but he nevertheless did so as a precaution that was on the right side.

The turnkey opened the massive door by which Charles De Vere had been admitted into that court-yard in the morning; and the long stone corridor was only dimly lighted by an iron lamp suspended to the ceiling. Charles threaded it at the same pace which he knew it was Father Falconara's habit to adopt; and the turnkey followed him. What moments of acute suspense were these! and how completely did our hero experience the necessity of being on his guard while within the range of that official's keen vision! On reaching the door at the other extremity of the stone passage, Charles stopped, but did not step aside, nor seem as if he thought that the turnkey who was with him ought to open it; for he knew not whether such would prove to be the case. And fortunate was it that he acted thus cautiously and guardedly; for the slightest betrayal of a want of acquaintance with the discipline and the habits of the castle might have proved fatal to him. He stopped short, as we have said: the turnkey who was close at his heels, necessarily stopped short likewise; and at the same instant the man stretched forth his hand to pull a wire which hung against the wall and which communicated with a bell in the lobby. The massive door was at once opened by the sentinel who stood thereat; and Charles De Vere, with the kerchief up to his countenance, crossed the threshold.

He was now in the lobby,—that same lobby where he had first seen Father Falconara in the morning. And this lobby, too, he it remembered had three doors, with a sentinel standing at each. Charles was completely self-possessed: he knew that everything depended upon the manner in which his part was performed. A glance that he flung around, over the kerchief which he was holding up to his face, showed him that there were only the three sentinels in the lobby at the moment the door was thrown open. He recollected the door by which he had seen Father Falconara enter in the morning; and crossing the lobby, he advanced straight towards that door. The sentinel stood back with an air of the deepest respect; but as he did not make a movement to open the door, Charles trembled for an instant in his bewilderment how to act. Was there a bell to ring? or ought he to knock? or what was to be done? But Ah! a glance showed him something—and he felt that he was safe. That door had a handle—whereas the other doors had none. He grasped it—it yielded to his touch—he opened that door, and in a few moments was ascending a stone staircase, the door closing behind him. His heart beat with exultation; for he felt that at least half of his task was accomplished, and his soul was now full of hope.

"I must remember," he said to himself, "to take the door to the right instead of that to the left. Ah! generous priest!—stifling, as you did, all your own last remaining scruples, in order to afford me that full amount of information which should guide me on the route to freedom!"

At the head of the staircase there was a small landing, where a lamp was burning. There was consequently no possibility of making any mistake in respect to the doors; and Charles at once opened that which stood upon his right hand. He found himself in a neatly furnished little parlour; and a light was burning upon the table. He passed into the adjacent room: it was a bed-chamber, as the priest had described it; and there too stood the curiously carved bureau of walnut-wood. Unhesitatingly did Charles proceed to examine the drawers; for he knew very well that the bag of money, which he speedily discovered, was intended for his own use,—as a gift if he thought fit so to regard it; but if not, as a loan, which at any future time he might refund. And his heart was filled with grateful emotions as he murmured to himself, "Oh! with what admirable delicacy and tact was it all managed!—how noble, how generous is the whole conduct of the priest towards me!"

Charles De Vere secured the bag of money about his person; and for an instant he was tempted to make use of the writing-materials that he found ready at hand, for the purpose of leaving a note expressive of the illimitable gratitude which he felt towards Father Falconara. But a second thought made him renounce this idea. The young priest evidently sought to carry out his own generous aims in the way that should be the least calculated to interfere with his scruples of conscience; and above all things it would have pained him to receive the positive proof that his kind purposes had been seen through and his generous designs fathomed.

"I will find some signal occasion," said Charles to himself, "to convince Father Falconara of my gratitude, without making direct and positive allusion to the services which have engendered that lasting sentiment."

While thus musing to himself, Charles again took the candle in his hand, and retraced his way into the sitting apartment. At that very instant the outer door opened; and notwithstanding the natural courage of the youth's mind and the degree of self-possession with which he was now armed, he could not help being so suddenly startled by the unexpected incident that he dropped the candlestick, and the light was extinguished!

Nevertheless, the lamp which burnt on the landing, threw its light partially into the room, and revealed to the eyes of our hero the form of an elderly female upon the threshold.

"I crave the pardon of your reverence," she said, in some rustic *patois* which horribly disfigured the beauty of the Italian tongue; "but I have been watching for you for the last half-hour. I saw you return two or three minutes ago—I knocked at the door—but as you did not answer, I took the liberty to open it. I hope I have done no wrong?"

Charles did not answer a word. Indeed, how could he reply? What could he say? Who was this woman? wherefore should she have watched for him? what did she want? He was frightfully perplexed—cruelly bewildered! And there he stood, in the semi-obscurity of the room, with the kerchief up to his countenance—while the old woman still remained upon the threshold.

"Will your reverence come?" she inquired. "The Captain is gone out; and—and," she added in a peculiar tone, "you must know, Father Falconara, that you are expected—or at least that you will be welcome."

What on earth was Charles to do? Dare he refuse to go with the woman? If he were to speak even the slightest word, should he not betray himself? He thought for an instant of seizing upon her, and gagging and binding her with a somewhat greater amount of reality and sternness of purpose than had ere now been shown in his treatment of Father Falconara: but that idea was abandoned the moment it was formed. For he now perceived that the opposite door was standing open—he knew it communicated with the governor's apartments—and therefore he apprehended that the very instant he made a menacing movement towards that elderly female, a cry would burst forth from her lips and his destruction would be consummated. The only course which seemed to be reasonably open to him, was to follow the woman, to dare the new adventure which presented itself, and trust to the chapter of accidents to bring him to a safe issue.

Waving for a moment the hand which held the kerchief, as an intimation that the woman was to lead the way, he the next instant applied the kerchief to his face again and passed forth from the apartment. The landing was crossed: he followed the woman through the entrance communicating with the Governor's apartments. Was not this very much like running into the lion's den? Charles feared that it might be so: but yet, on the other hand, he recollected that his elderly guide had declared "that the Captain was absent;" and as this most probably alluded to the Governor of the fortress there was so much the less danger to be dreaded.

As Charles De Vere crossed the threshold of that doorway which might almost be likened unto the entrance into the lion's den, as we have just hinted, the woman paused to shut the door; and then rapidly flinging a look of peculiarly meaning upon our hero, she continued to lead the way, at the same time saying, "Your reverence has either a very bad cold, or else you are just for all the world like a timid young virgin who conceals her blushing countenance."

By the time the woman had finished her observations, she had reached a door at the extremity of a vestibule which was long, narrow, and gloomy. This door she threw open; and then she stood aside for Charles De Vere to pass onward. He did so immediately; for it was now in a species of desperation that he was resolved to see the issue of the adventure. He had by this time half begun to suspect that a tender intrigue might prove to be involved therein,—though he could scarcely reconcile the supposition with the favourable idea he entertained in reference to the strict purity of Father Falconara's principles and morals.

Lights were burning inside the apartment where Charles De Vere now found himself: the door had closed behind him—the elderly female had not followed him across the threshold—but still he was not alone in that room. A lady sat upon a sofa; and the conviction was now firmly established in our hero's mind that the adventure would take the complexion he had anticipated.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TWO DISGUISES.

THE lady in whose presence Charles De Vere thus found himself, was elegantly dressed in the evening costume. Handsome she was not—neither was she exactly pretty; but yet her countenance was interesting, while her figure was voluptuous and striking. She appeared to be about six-and-thirty years of age; she might even have been a couple of years older—for her toilet being gay and juvenile in its fashion, afforded her the benefit of all its advantages. She had small features, which were delicate without being regular, and which were somewhat too diminutive for the fulness of the face: but she had handsome dark blue eyes and a set of admirably preserved teeth. Her brown hair was thrown back from above her high forehead; and it was suffered to flow upon her shoulders and down her back with what may be termed a studied negligence, and which was rendered all the more *piquant* by a picturesque kind of head-dress to which a veil was attached. Altogether, with the advantage of her toilet, with her fine figure, her softly rounded shoulders of snowy whiteness, her handsome eyes, and her good teeth, the lady was far from an unattractive personage.

She sat in a species of half pensive, half bashful mood, for nearly a minute after Charles De Vere thus found himself in her presence: her eyes, which for an instant had been fixed upon him with a peculiar look, were bent down; and she seemed as if she had taken some step of which she was half afraid, but which nevertheless was the result of some irresistible infatuation. Charles now suddenly fancied that he had made another discovery in reference to the adventure wherein he found himself involved. Father Falconara had spoken of the Governor's wife and daughter. This then must assuredly be the wife? She had conceived a guilty passion for the young priest, but she had not hitherto gone to any great lengths in avowing it—perhaps indeed she had seen that her looks, her hints, and her intimations were either understood but partially, or else reciprocated but feebly—even if at all; and now she thought to avail herself of her husband's temporary absence to bring matters to an explanation.

These were the ideas which swept through the mind of Charles De Vere; and they were naturally engendered by the half-bashful, half-frightened demeanour which the lady wore; for if things had gone further than he suspected, and if there really existed any undue familiarity between herself and Father Falconara, would she not have sprung forward to clasp in her arms the seeming priest who now stood in her presence?

Yea—a minute passed while De Vere remained standing close by the door, and still hiding his countenance with a white kerchief. Thus he had not merely leisure to observe the appearance of the lady, as we have already described it—but he also noticed that the room was handsomely furnished and exhibited all the evidences of feminine taste. There were vases of flowers: the draperies were well appointed; and the open casements afforded a glimpse of a green-house with

which they communicated, and within the glass frame-work of which heavy clusters of ripe grapes were ready for the hand that might be stretched forth to pluck them. It was evident that the Governor's wife and daughter had studied to subdue the prison-like gloom of the fortress as much as they possibly could, so far as their own habitation was concerned.

"Will you not advance?" the lady at length said, rising from the sofa, and now flinging upon the seeming priest a look that was expressive of her own fluttering pleasure, and at the same time deprecatory of any remonstrance or rebuke on his part. "Did not Ursula tell you that my husband had gone to pass the evening with some friends in the town? Carlotta has gone with her father; and therefore I—But wherefore do you remain there? why thus persist in concealing your countenance? Ah! have my looks been really misunderstood? or have you altogether failed to perceive the demonstrations of love which I have from time to time ventured—"

"Signora," said Charles, suddenly resolving to bring matters to a crisis, "you are mistaken! I—"

A low half-subdued shriek burst from the lips of Signora Belluno; for the tones of our hero's voice had enabled her to anticipate the avowal which he was about to make—namely, that he was not Father Falconara.

"Be silent, Signora!—or you will betray yourself!" he ejaculated, as he suddenly removed the kerchief from his face and advanced quickly towards her, full of a feverish excitement as he found that she was now seized with a terror which if loudly and passionately expressed, might prove destruction to himself.

"Who are you, holy sir?" she quickly demanded. "And how came you here?"

"Can you not understand, Signora, that I am a friend of Father Falconara's?"

"But you are not an Italian?" she interjected.

"No—I am a Frenchman," was the ready response given by our hero. "In short, I am the chaplain to the French Embassy at Florence—I came to see my beloved friend Father Falconara—"

"Just heaven! and what a secret have you discovered!" exclaimed the lady, now throwing herself upon the sofa and wringing her hands. "I am ruined! I am degraded! I am undone! Oh, fatal passion!—miserable, miserable infatuation!"

"Signora," Charles hastened to explain, "take courage! I am a man of honour! and though a priest, I can make allowances! Alas, full well do I know that the flesh is frail—"

"But, Oh! reverend sir!" cried Signora Belluno, "you will betray me to your friend! You will now render me contemptible and ridiculous in his eyes!"

"No, signora—no!" cried Charles.

"Oh, if I could put faith in your promise," cried the unhappy lady, "I should be comforted!—an immense weight would be taken off my mind!"

"Signora, wherefore should you not believe me?" asked our hero, who was driven almost to frenzy by this delay which was taking place ere further steps were adopted to ensure his escape from the castle; for he dreaded lest at any in-

stant some accident should betray the stratagem and expose the whole plot the success of which was so vitally important to himself.

"Yes, yee—I must believe you!" said Signora Belluno. "But how could I again look you in the face without blushing? When did you arrive at the castle?"

"When did I arrive? Oh, this evening!"

"Then you have not yet seen my husband?" demanded the lady quickly.

"No, signora. I suppose that I must have come after he had left to pass the evening with his friends—or else Father Falconara would have presented me to him."

"Then you must have come suddenly and unexpectedly?—for no inmate of the castle is permitted to receive any visitors—I mean to stay within the walls—unless with the formal assent of my husband."

"Ah! if I have infringed any regulations," cried Charles, catching at the hope which seemed suddenly held out to him, "suffer me to depart at once!—let me not compromise my friend, who has doubtless committed some oversight!"

"Why, good heavens! what means this?" suddenly ejaculated the Governor's wife. "That garb—I recognise it! Yes—'tis the very same!—'tis Father Falconara's! Oh, blessed saint! there is some horrible mystery! And you are too young to be a priest!—you cannot have numbered more than twenty years of age!"

At this moment the door of the apartment burst open; and Ursula—the elderly female who had brought Charles De Vere thither—rushed in, exclaiming in wild affright, "We are lost, signora! we are lost! Oh, wretch that you are! Brigand! robber! what have you done?"—and these last words were vehemently addressed to our hero.

Charles had at once raised the kerchief to his countenance, immediately upon the bursting open of the door: but Ursula, springing forward, tore it away as she gave vent to those violent reproaches.

"In the name of heaven what is the matter?" demanded Signora Belluno, who had become pale as death; for her previously excited suspicions that something was wrong, were now fearfully confirmed.

"This villain is an escaped prisoner!" ejaculated Ursula. "He feigned illness—he bound and gagged the good Father Falconara—he is the young man who arrived this morning with the lady—"

"Wretch!" said the Governor's wife, flinging a terrific look upon Charles De Vere.

"The turnkey went in kindness to his cell," proceeded Ursula, "to take him some extra bedding—"

"Listen!" said our hero, now perceiving the absolute necessity of acting sternly and promptly and availing himself of the advantage which the lady's indiscretion had given him. "You are both in my power—and I command you to be silent!"

Both Signora Belluno and the woman Ursula recognised in a moment the truth of the assertion that they were in De Vere's power; and they were smitten speechless with consternation—for the one stood terribly in awe of a stern husband,

and the other of a master who possessed alike the means and the disposition to be implacable in the vengeance. Our hero strode towards the door and locked it.

"Now, signora," he said, hastily returning to confront the Governor's wife, "my freedom is in your hands—and you must accomplish it!"

"Impossible!" she ejaculated, with dismay upon her features.

"There seemed to be no such word as *impossible*," replied Charles quickly, "when the gratification of your passion was concerned; and I shall not admit of it now when my liberty is at stake."

"But what can I do?" asked the unfortunate woman, who seemed to be utterly bewildered.

"Oh, my dear young gentleman!" cried Ursula, who also looked the very picture of mingled terror and despair; "go and surrender yourself! Keep silence! a lady's honour is at stake."

"I did not court this position," rejoined Charles, hastily but firmly; "and my circumstances are so desperate that I have no choice but to avail myself of the advantage which it gives me. Save me!—it is the only condition of your safety!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Signora Belluno, suddenly displaying a new phase of conduct; "what if I were to dare you to do your worst? Here we are two to one!—our assertions will outvalue yours! You came into this apartment, mistaking your way—"

"Ridiculous!" ejaculated Charles, with indignant vehemence,—"when I had already passed through the lobby to visit the priest's rooms, and knew that my way was down the staircase again. The tale will not serve you! You are both in my power, I repeat; and by heaven! if I am recaptured I will reveal the whole truth. Hide me—take me to your own chamber, signora! No one will penetrate thither!"

The lady exchanged rapid looks with Ursula: they both saw that the young gentleman was firm—and they comprehended that his was a neck-or-nothing position.

"Come quick!" said Signora Belluno; "and you, Ursula, unlock that door!—for if any one should seek to enter here and find it fastened, suspicions may be excited!"

Having thus spoken, the Governor's wife hastily led Charles De Vere to an inner apartment, which was evidently a dining-room; at the same time that Ursula proceeded to unlock the door of the sitting apartment which the other two had just quitted. Meanwhile Signora Belluno conducted De Vere from the dining-room, along a corridor, into a bed-chamber; and throwing open the door of a dressing-room, she said, "Remain here! I will go and see what is to be done!"

The lady then rapidly retraced her way; and on reaching the sitting apartment, she found the turnkey waiting for her, he having entered a few moments back.

"Oh! dear signors!" exclaimed Ursula, rushing forward to meet her mistress; "such a calamity has happened! And his Excellency absent at the moment too!"

"A calamity?" ejaculated Signora Belluno, assuming an air of mingled surprise and terror; "what do you mean? What is it, Rodrigo?" she demanded, turning towards the official.

"It is most mysterious, signora," was the reply.



"A young prisoner, who arrived this morning—Number Twenty-nine—has managed to escape. He assailed our good priest—gagged and bound him—put on his vestments—"

"Heavens! is this possible?" exclaimed Signora Belluno, affecting consternation and dismay.

"It is so, signora," rejoined the turnkey; "and the most singular part of it is that the young fellow is not to be found, although it is next to certain that he did not pass a second time through the lobby."

"But a person does not require to pass a second time through the lobby," said the Governor's wife, "in order to escape. Once is sufficient."

"Ah! but you do not understand, signora!" cried Roderigo. "This fellow had the audacity to ascend by the private door—doubtless he meant to visit the good priest's rooms, for some purpose or another—perhaps to obtain a cloak or money—"

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who knows? At all events he did not descend again—"

"When were the sentinels in the lobby changed?" demanded the Governor's wife.

"A few minutes after the prisoner, in the disguise of Father Falconara's dress, passed through," was the response.

"Ah! then, rest assured," quickly rejoined the lady, "that there has been some mistake on the part of the sentinels! Perhaps when the ceremony of changing them was taking place, they did not observe any one cross the lobby."

"This is scarcely probable, signora," cried Roderigo: "and yet—"

"Have Father Falconara's rooms been searched?" demanded the lady.

"Yes, signora. His reverence himself is now there. He does not say that he has missed anything—"

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"Then if the prisoner be still in the castle," hastily interjected the Governor's wife, "he must be concealed somewhere in these rooms! Come, let us search! Have you got your pistols, Rodrigo?"

The man drew forth a brace from the breast of his surcoat; and Signora Belluno, catching hold of one of them, said with a resolute air, "In my husband's absence I must do my duty with courage and firmness. Come, let us search!"

Rodrigo proceeded to look behind the draperies, under the sofas, and in the green-house built projectingly along the casements. They passed into the dining-room, where the search was continued; they entered the corridor, and they continued their investigations in three or four apartments which opened thence. On reaching the bed-chamber at the extremity, Signora Belluno said, "Remain you here at the door, Rodrigo; but be ready to succour me in case of need."

She entered the chamber: she looked under the bed—behind the draperies and hangings—and in the cupboard: then she entered the dressing-room, a pistol in one hand and a candle in the other. The instant she crossed the threshold, she darted a significant look upon Charles De Vere; and he comprehended the stratagem which she was executing.

"There is no one here," she said, retracing her steps from the dressing-room and closing the door behind her.

"And there is no other outlet!" ejaculated Rodrigo. "This is the most wonderful thing I ever knew in the whole course of my life! But we have sent off for his Excellency; and when he arrives we shall see what is to be done."

"But have you despatched persons on horseback in pursuit?" demanded the lady. "This is of the utmost consequence!"

"No—I have not done so, signora," responded Rodrigo. "In fact, it all happened so suddenly, and took us so completely by surprise——"

"No doubt! no doubt!" said the lady quickly. "But let this now be done! Have horses saddled!—lose not a moment!"

"Not a moment, signora!"—and away sped the turnkey to execute the mandate which he had just received.

The Governor's wife threw herself upon a sofa in the sitting-apartment, almost overpowered by the excitement of her feelings. Ursula was there; and looking piteously in the face of her mistress, she said, "Ah, now, signora, what, in the name of the blessed saints, is to be done?"

"I know not!" responded the lady, wringing her hands in despair. "For the present he is concealed: but heaven only can tell how long he may be safe!"

"And his Excellency is sent for!" exclaimed Ursula: "in a few minutes he will be here!"

"Ah! an idea strikes me!" cried Signora Belluno. "Yea! it is the only means! Hasten down to your son—urge him to get the horses saddled as speedily as possible—tell him that my husband will lose his situation if the prisoner be not caught! Do your best to create confusion—bewilder the hostlers—offer to lend out the steeds into the yard as fast as they are saddled—and take care that there is a horse in readiness for any

one who whispers in your ear the number *Twenty-nine*!"

Ursula hastened off to execute the commands of her mistress; and we should here observe that her son was the head hostler in the stables of the Governor.

Signora Belluno now sped back to the dressing-room,—this time with a candle only in her hand, and with no pistol. Charles De Vere was most anxiously awaiting her presence.

"Good heavens!" she whispered in an almost rending tone; "what am I suffering for your sakes! But you shall be saved if you follow my counsel!—and there is not a moment to be lost! Here! put on this uniform! Be quick! Five minutes at the very outside are all that can be thus wasted!"

While still speaking, Signora Belluno tore open a clothes-press and displayed a martial suit which belonged to her husband; and she knew, or at least hoped, that in the darkness of the night, and in the confusion prevailing in the court-yard, it would pass for the uniform of one of the subordinate officials employed in the fortress. She left a light in the dressing-room; and retiring into the bed-chamber, hastily took the sheets and quilt off the bed, twisting and knotting them into a rope. She was a prey to the most feverish anxiety:—never in all her life had she laboured under such a state of excitement,—for the return of her husband ere her projects were fully executed, would spoil everything!

The rope was finished—and she impatiently tapped at the door of the dressing-room.

"I am ready," said Charles, at once opening it.

The lady rushed in: and sure enough, our young hero was completely arrayed in the uniform which had been furnished him. Even to the cocked hat the apparel was perfect!—but the garments hung somewhat loosely on De Vere's form, for he was more slender than the Governor of Bagno.

Signora Belluno opened the window of the dressing-room, and made one end of the rope fast to some massive article of furniture which stood conveniently at hand. The night was pitch dark; but it was evident that the utmost excitement prevailed throughout the castle; for the trampling of steeds, the sounds of martial weapons, the exclamations of many voices, the opening and shutting of doors and gates,—all combined to form one general din, which had already reached the ears of our hero and the lady even before the window was opened, but which now was heard all the more plainly.

"Descend by this rope," said the Governor's wife, speaking in a rapid and excited manner. "It is long enough, I have no doubt! You will find yourself in a small yard, the walls of which are not very high. Exactly facing this window there is a cistern, up which you may climb; and by the aid thereof you can scale the wall. You will then be in the yard attached to the stables of the officers. See! there are lights now moving about in that yard! Bustle and confusion there prevail! Ursula is there—she will have a horse in readiness for you! Look out for her—and whisper in her ear the number *Twenty-nine*! Ah, I had well-nigh forgotten! Have you money for your expenses on the road?"

"Yes, signora," replied Charles. "A thousand, thousand thanks for all this that you are doing on my account!"

Our hero was already upon the sill of the window as he thus expressed his gratitude: the next moment he was lowering himself down by the rope. Signora Belluno dared not remain another instant in the dressing-room,—no, not even to watch the progress of De Vere from the little yard beneath the window into the larger yard adjoining. But she left the window open: in short, she suffered everything alike in the dressing-room and the bed-chamber to remain in the state of confusion into which her proceedings had thrown those apartments, because she would have presently her own tale to tell. Taking away the candle from the dressing-room and extinguishing the light in the chamber, she sped back to the sitting-apartment where we first introduced her to the reader. She found no one there: she hurried out upon the landing, for the purpose of descending the stairs into the lobby, with the ostensible object of making inquiries whether the escaped prisoner was recaptured, but in reality that she might show herself somewhere at that crisis. But on the landing she encountered Father Falconera, who was just emerging from his own apartments. He had put on another ecclesiastical suit which he possessed: his looks were composed,—but his cheeks were perhaps even paler than was their wont.

"Ah, reverend sir!" exclaimed Signora Belluno, "how rejoiced I am to perceive that you have suffered comparatively so little from the diabolical outrage!"

"I thank you, signora, for your generous sympathy," responded the ecclesiastic. "Do you know whether the prisoner has effected his escape, or whether he is retaken?" he quietly asked.

"I know nothing, holy sir!" cried the lady. "I was coming forth to put the same question! My husband has been sent for—But perhaps he has come?—perhaps you have seen him?"

"No, signora," rejoined the priest. "I have been in my own apartments, resuming a suitable apparel."

"Ah, yes! the villain stripped you of your upper raiment, I am told—and bound you hand and foot—and gagged you!"—but Signora Belluno had already noticed that the gagging process had not in the slightest degree injured Father Falconera's beautiful teeth.

At this moment the door at the bottom of the staircase opened; and Captain Belluno made his appearance, accompanied by his daughter,—a rather nice-looking girl, of about fifteen or sixteen, and who possessed a figure which had all the justness of symmetry without the voluptuous fullness of her mother's shape.

"What tidings, my dear husband?" inquired Signora Belluno, who was now playing her part with considerable tact and ability.

"If the young fellow is still within the castle walls, he must be speedily recaptured," responded the Governor; "and from everything I can learn, I do not possibly think he could have got outside the gates. However, I have ordered that no one should be allowed to pass without giving the watch-word—In short, I have taken every precaution."

Signora Belluno dropped her kerchief and hastily

stooped to pick it up—for she felt that the ghastliest pallor came over her countenance as she heard the announcement that *no one could pass the gates without the watch-word!* With lightning rapidity she calculated that her husband must have been at least some minutes inside the castle—if not longer—in receiving explanations and giving his orders; and those orders would therefore be in time enough to frustrate her scheme at its very last step and bar the outer gates effectually against the escaped prisoner!

But while the lady is making every effort to regain her self-possession and wield a strong control over her feelings—while her daughter is plying her rapid questions in respect to the circumstances of the escape from the cell, little suspecting however that her mother could, if she chose, relate all subsequent particulars,—and while Captain Belluno is expressing to Father Falconera his sympathy for the outrage which was experienced by the young priest—we will see how it was faring with Charles De Vere.

Having glided down the rope from the dressing-room window, and safely alighted in the little yard below, Charles quickly found his way to the cistern, upon which he clambered. As Signora Belluno had intimated, he found that by the succour of this cistern he was enabled to climb the boundary-wall into the next yard. Lanterns were there being hurried to and fro—oscillating like meteors in the darkness; and thus Charles had to select a particular moment to let himself over the wall into the yard, so as to escape the danger of having the light of one of those lanterns suddenly turned upon him. Keeping beneath the black shade thrown by the wall, he flung his looks in every direction, in search of the woman Ursula. Ah! there she was!—and sure enough, she was holding a horse by the bridle! Charles glided towards her, and whispered in her ear—"Twenty-nine!"

She beheld the form emerging from the depths of the surrounding darkness:—for a moment she thought it was that of the Governor himself, and she was about to give vent to an ejaculation, when the words "Twenty-nine" were thus whispered in her ear.

"Mount!" she said. "Quick! quick!—and away with you to that gate through which you see half-a-dozen horsemen now pressing!"

Charles was on the horse's back in a moment; he received a whip from the woman's hand; and the next instant he was passing through the gateway to which she had alluded. He was now in the principal court-yard of the castle,—the one which the postchaise had entered and where he and Ciprino had therefrom alighted in the morning. He was just behind the half-dozen horsemen who had preceded him when issuing forth from the stable-yard: he was careful not to get sufficiently far into their midst to stand the chance of being recognised by any sudden light flashing upon his countenance; and he was likewise cautious enough not to remain so far in the rear as to cause any particular attention to be riveted upon himself. The night was as black as pitch; and the only lights which were to be seen in the outer court-yard were at the great gates. Everything appeared to be progressing favourably; and Charles felt as if his escape was already as good as ensured when he heard the foremost of

the party of horsemen vociferating forth the welcome cry, "Open the gates!—make haste! We are going out in pursuit!"

But the next instant Charles De Vere's heart suddenly sank within him, as a voice from the gate exclaimed, "The Governor has just ordered that persons must go out singly and not in groups; and no one can pass without giving the watch-word!"

"Good!" ejaculated the foremost of the party: and bending forward in his saddle, he whispered the watch-word to the porter at the gates.

The gates flew open; and that particular horseman at once galloped forth. It happened that the steed on which Charles was mounted, was naturally high mettled; and it was now full of spirits in consequence of not having been out for exercise during the last few days. Therefore, no sooner were the gates thrown open, than the impatient steed bounded forward, and brought Charles, with a rush as it were, into the very midst of the group.

"Here's his Excellency himself!" ejaculated two or three voices, as the light from the gates flashed upon the gold lace on the cocked hat, and which lace distinguished it from the hat worn by an ordinary police-official.

The porter who was on the very point of barring the way until the second horseman whispered the watch-word in his ear, now stood back; the steed which Charles bestrode dashed forward—it was the Governor's favourite animal—a large black horse, with white binder feet—and at a glance therefore it was recognised by all whose eyes settled for a moment upon it. Away went the entire party through the gateway; for the porter no longer thought of demanding watch-words while the superior authority of the Governor was (as he thought) manifesting itself. The fortress stood at a distance of about a couple of hundred yards from the town: the mettled animal which Charles bestrode, speedily outstripped the other horsemen; and on reaching the principal street of Bagno, our hero took the turning which led in the direction of Florence. For towards the capital was he resolved to make the best of his way,—trusting to the excellence of the steed to outstrip all pursuit, and to reach his destination—a distance of upwards of forty miles—ere the night should be very far advanced; for it was now only just nine o'clock in the evening.

But let us return for a brief space into the castle whence our hero has just succeeded in effecting his escape. We left the Governor and his wife, their daughter, and the young ecclesiastic, together upon the landing; and the Signora Belluno was a prey to the most intense anxiety—for she trembled lest every moment the door at the bottom of the staircase should open, and a triumphant voice should send the intelligence pealing upward to the effect that the escaped prisoner was recaptured. In a few minutes that door *did* open; and the women Ursula began to ascend the staircase.

"Any tidings?" demanded the Governor.

"Nothing favourable, signor," was the reply. "The prisoner is not yet found inside the castle—nor is he brought back from the outside."

"The outside!" ejaculated the Governor. "I do not believe he has reached the outside! You are sure, my dear," he added, turning to his wife,

"that you and Roderigo thoroughly searched all our apartments?"

"Yes—that my brave mistress did!" said Ursula. "With a pistol in her hand——"

"Ah! Roderigo told me this," said the Governor; "and I am proud of you," he added, bending upon his wife a look of greater tenderness than had for some years relaxed the sternness of his features.

"Roderigo assisted me in the search, everywhere except just in our own bed-chamber. But I can assure you," added the lady, with a smile, "that even *there* I did not incur any particular risk: for Roderigo remained just outside the threshold——"

"And you searched in the dressing-room?" inquired the Governor.

"Yes—everywhere that I could think of."

"The wardrobe in the dressing-room?" suggested the Governor inquiringly.

His wife gave a start—and then said, "No! not the wardrobe! It really escaped my thoughts—or else perhaps I knew it was so full of your clothing, that——"

"The very place where the fellow might have hidden, and where he may be still hiding!" exclaimed the Governor, flinging an angry look upon his wife, and forgetting that scarcely two minutes had elapsed since he had flung upon her a glance of pride and approbation.

Away sped the Governor, with his drawn sword in his hand, towards the dressing-room; his wife, his daughter, the priest, and Ursula followed close behind. But Ursula found an opportunity to fling upon her mistress a significant look, which was as much as to imply that all had progressed favourably and that the object of her solicitude had succeeded in effecting his escape. The heart of the Signora Belluno bounded in her bosom with a sense of relief which appeared to transport her all in a moment from purgatory into paradise.

The Governor of Bagno, with his drawn sword in one hand, and a candle which he had caught up in the other, rushed through the apartments and along the corridor until he reached the bed-chamber. An ejaculation burst from his lips; the bedding was all in disorder—appearances were ominous! Another moment, and he was in the dressing-room. The draught from the open window almost blew out his candle—he tripped and nearly fell through his feet catching in the ecclesiastical garments which lay scattered on the floor—and it was literally a yell of rage that came forth from his tongue as he beheld the wardrobe door standing wide open, and at a glance missed a suit of uniform from the peg to which it was accustomed to hang!

To be brief, it was only too evident that the prisoner had escaped; and though Signora Belluno passed without sustaining the slightest tinge of suspicion, yet she had to endure all the ill-temper of her husband, who was tremendously irritated at the idea that she should have forgotten to look into the wardrobe,—“the very place,” as he said, “where the cunning young fellow was certain to hide himself while the search was being instituted!”

CHAPTER XV.

ANTONIA.

RECALLING the attention of the reader to the Mirano mansion, we must now proceed to observe that Edgar Marcellin slept soundly throughout the night on which Ciprina and Charles De Vere were carried off in the way that has already been so minutely described. It was under the influence of La Dolfin's soporific medicament that the young Frenchman slumbered on so deeply and so uninterruptedly; and it was not until between eight and nine o'clock in the morning that he opened his eyes. Being accustomed to find Ciprina seated by the side of the couch when he awoke, he was somewhat surprised that she was not now at her usual post; and then as his thoughts were rapidly collecting themselves, he remembered that he ought to have seen Charles De Vere during the past night. It naturally occurred to him that as he had fallen asleep Ciprina did not choose to awake him for that interview with the young English gentlemen; and Edgar felt inclined to be bitterly annoyed at what he could not help looking upon as an over-anxious care on Ciprina's part for his health. Impatient to learn whether Charles had been—and if so, what he had said, and when he was coming again,—Edgar Marcellin agitated upon the side-table the glass which contained the refreshing beverage he was wont to partake of: but all was still in the adjacent apartment. Then he noticed that the door of communication between the two chambers was shut; and he grew more and more surprised—for this was the first time that the circumstance had occurred! He descended from his couch—opened the door—and called Ciprina. There was no answer. He looked into her chamber: she was not there—and the bed evidently had not been occupied all night. Marcellin proceeded into the boudoir, and thence into the ante-room; but no Ciprina was to be seen. What could be the cause of this disappearance? Ah! it suddenly struck Edgar that Ciprina might have gone to pay another visit to La Dolfin on his behalf; and perceiving no other solution for the mystery, he retired to his own room.

"Is it possible," he asked himself, "that I could have suffered a relapse during the past night,—that Ciprina therefore sat up with me—and that alarmed at my condition, she has now gone to consult that woman to whose art and skill I have already been indebted? And yet I do not feel as if I had suffered any such relapse. On the contrary, it seems to me that I am far better than I could have expected—I might almost say that I feel as if I were nearly approaching towards convalescence."

Half-an-hour elapsed, during which Edgar Marcellin lay in his bed in a feverish state of excitement; for though he fancied that he had accounted for Ciprina's absence, yet there was a vague undefined uneasiness in his mind, which he however sought to attribute to the attenuating effects of illness. At length he ejaculated, "By heaven, it is strange she does not return!"—and again springing from his couch, he enveloped him-

self in a dressing-gown, for he could no longer remain in bed.

He passed into the boudoir; and then he fancied that he heard a gentle knocking at the outer door of the ante-room. He flew thither. The door was locked—the key was *inside*—how therefore was it possible that Ciprina could have quitted the suite of apartments? At the same instant an idea struck him like the recollection of a horrible vision. It was the tale which he had heard of a secret means of communication with that ante-room; and he fancied that some new treachery on the part of Lucrezia di Mirano might possibly have been at work.

But at the same time that this thought flashed through his imagination, his hand was already turning the key in the lock: the door opened—and Antonia made her appearance.

"Your young mistress?" demanded Edgar hastily: "the Signora Ciprina—where is she?"

Antonia looked astonished at the question; and she said, "The Signora Ciprina? I left her here last night, signor!"

"Come in!—come in, for heaven's sake!" interjected Edgar, with feverish impatience; and it was almost with violence that he dragged Antonia into the room from the threshold where she had stopped short, transfixed by surprise at the question which Marcellin had put to her. "You left your mistress here, you say?"

"Yes, signor," was the response.

"At what o'clock?" demanded Edgar, with increasing impatience.

"At about midnight—in company with that English gentleman!"

"Ah! Mr. De Vere?" ejaculated Marcellin.

"Then he came?—you brought him here?"

"Yes, signor," rejoined Antonia, who was now becoming frightened as well as astonished. "But, good heavens! what has happened?—has the signora disappeared?"

"Antonia!" interrupted Marcellin, "some foul treachery has been at work! You know the reason for which the threads were stretched along the walls of these rooms."

"Scarcely, signor," cried Antonia. "Are any of those threads broken? Did you hear the bell ring in the night?"

"No, no," answered Edgar. "Those strings, you know, are only in the boudoir and the bed-chambers—but not in this ante-room! It was through fear of secret doors being fitted in the walls of either of those rooms—But did not your mistress tell you?"

"No, signor," responded Antonia. "My mistress was wont to issue her orders—I obeyed them—and that was all. She was but little accustomed to give explanations; and I never sought them. I certainly wondered to see all those strings arranged in the boudoir and the bed-rooms, communicating with a bell over the Signora Ciprina's couch: but I fancied it was to—guard against a surprise on the part of the *sbirri*, as you had fought a duel!"

"Well, at all events, you see that they were precautions of some kind?" ejaculated Marcellin. "And you were placed for a couple of nights running to sleep in this ante-room, in a couch which you were wont to make up against that wall!"

"Blessed saints!" cried the girl becoming very pale; "what are all these things you are telling me, signor? Secret doors in the walls—precautions—Oh! what has happened to my dear mistress? what do you fear? what do you apprehend?"

"Some terrible treachery has been at work, Antonia! Your mistress is not here—and this door was locked on the inside. It could not therefore be by these means that she went forth!"

"And that Englishman, signor?" ejaculated Antonia,—"think you that he was capable——"

"He capable of doing her any harm? Oh, no! he was a friend who came to succour me! Ah, this mystery is dreadful—dreadful, Antonia! Yes—it could have been no delusion on the part of your mistress! She must have seen that wainscot open and then crouch behind the Marchioness on that memorable night——"

"The Marchioness?" ejaculated Antonia. "Ah! I have had my suspicions that there was something wrong on the part of the Marchioness! The Signora Ciprina and yourself have asked so many questions concerning her ladyship——"

"It is time you should know everything, Antonia," interrupted Marcellin; "and great is the pity that your mistress did not all along take you more completely into her confidence! You are faithful—and you love your mistress——"

"Oh, yee, signor! do not doubt it!" ejaculated Antonia, with tears in her eyes as she thus spoke. "Oh, if any harm has befallen her!"

"We must endeavour to penetrate this mystery," said Marcellin. "Whether your mistress and Mr. De Vere have been together treacherously dealt with—or whether it be your mistress only—are questions now involved in doubt and uncertainty. But listen, Antonia, while in a few words I tell you certain secrets which need not for another moment be concealed from you. The Marchioness was the real assassin of the unfortunate Giulio—but she would fain seek to fix the crime upon me! It was she who wounded me, when I stole secretly into this mansion to collect the necessary evidence to bring the crime home to her. She hates and mistrusts your mistress Ciprina, because Ciprina loves me and has saved my life. And when I spoke to you of secret passages, and of precautions that have been taken, it was because the other night the Marchioness stole into these rooms and poured poison into every jug, and glass, and cup——"

"Oh, signor!" ejaculated Antonia, with horror depicted in her countenance: "are we really beneath the roof of such a demoness?"

"Have you ever read of Lucrezia Borgia?" asked Edgar, with an impressive look and tone.

"Yes, yes!—and I know full well that the picture which was moved from the gallery to the Signora Ciprina's chamber, represents Lucrezia Borgia, though every one would say that it was painted——"

"As the portrait of Lucrezia di Mirano!" added Marcellin. "Yes!—and Lucrezia Mirano is as perfect a fiend as was Lucrezia Borgia! Now you know everything, Antonia! Will you render me your assistance to the utmost of your power?"

"I will, signor—I will!" exclaimed the young woman. "Oh, I will do anything that may help to solve the fate of my dear mistress, whom I love

so well; for she has been so kind and good to me! What can I do, signor?"

"In the first place," answered Edgar, "go and see if the Marchioness be returned from the villa; and if so, ascertain when she came back—throw yourself in her way—see if she puts any question to you concerning your mistress or me——In short, see how she will act."

"And if her ladyship be not at the mansion?" said Antonia inquiringly.

"Then hasten to Signor Petraro's—ascertain if Mr. De Vere returned thither last night—or where he is living in Florence. Then seek him—and beseech him to come to me."

"I will set off at once, signor," responded Antonia. "But do you not incur a fearful risk in remaining here? You say that the Marchioness seeks to affix upon you the foul crime of which she herself was really guilty. What if she were to invoke the aid of the police? In short, signor, what if she were to hand you over to the *sbirri*, under the horrible imputation——"

"All this I must risk, Antonia!" interrupted Marcellin. "But accept my best thanks for the generous interest which you display on my behalf. The Marchioness does not seem to have the courage to venture upon a bold and open fight. She is continuing the warfare by occult and perfidious means—she is digging mines and pitfalls—and this appears to have been her entire policy throughout; or else why did she not at any instant summon the *sbirri* into the mansion and give me into custody?—for she has all along known that I have been here. No, no! the whole course of her proceedings has been characterized by the slimy, stealthy, creeping conduct of the reptile; and not for a moment has she had the boldness to stand forward as an open foe and accuse me! She seeks to destroy all the evidences that I may accumulate—to destroy me likewise—but she dares not meet me in a court of justice!"

"But is it not almost unaccountable, signor," inquired Antonia, "that the Marchioness should have caused my mistress to be carried off, as you believe to have been the case,—and yet you yourself are left behind, though buried in a profound sleep, as you admit yourself to have been——"

"Truly, my dear Antonia," interrupted Marcellin, "there are many things which are mysterious and unaccountable: but we can only take the facts as we find them and reason upon them in that sense. There is just the possibility—the faint possibility—that your mistress Ciprina may have discovered the secret passage—that she may have gone forth by that means for some purpose—and that she may therefore presently return. In this case I am bound to tarry here and wait the result—though I confess that my fears far transcend my hopes——"

"Ah! I will lose not another instant, signor," exclaimed Antonia, "in doing my best to clear up this mystery! I will depart at once!"

"Ah! one word more?" ejaculated Marcellin. "When you introduced Mr. De Vere hither last night, did your mistress give you any particular instructions?"

"No, signor—only that I was to retire the moment I had conducted Mr. De Vere to the ante-room: therefore I concluded that I was not to sleep here last night, as on the two preceding nights I

had done; and the consequence was that I came not near the suite of apartments after having introduced Mr. De Vere thither."

Antonia now separated from Edgar Marcellin; and her first care was to ascertain whether the Marchioness had returned from the villa. She was answered in the negative: her ladyship was still at her beautiful little country-seat in the Vale of the Arno. Antonia glided up to her own chamber—put on her walking apparel—and stealing down the private staircase, issued from the mansion. In a very short time she was at Petrero's house.

"Have you seen the English gentleman," inquired Antonia, "since he quitted your house last night?"

"No—I have not seen him," was the response. "But I have had a letter from Signor Paoli—that person, you know, whom you have inquired about on former occasions——"

"True!" ejaculated Antonia. "What tidings can you give me respecting Signor Paoli?"

"He is obstinate, rash, and infatuated," rejoined Petrero. "He is determined to return in some disguise into Florence—he feels that he has duties to perform—at least so he phrases his letter——"

"And where is his letter?" inquired Antonia hastily.

"There," replied Petrero, pointing significantly to the fire. "You do not think that I would keep such a document in my house, when I believe that I am already more or less suspected of leaning too favourably to the democratic cause in general and to Signor Paoli in particular? However, my pretty young lass, you need not think that because the letter is destroyed, its contents are lost. Not a whit of it! Signor Paoli will be here to-morrow evening between nine and ten o'clock:—I would rather that he had made his appointment for some other place—but since he has taken this liberty with me, I suppose I must submit to it and run the risk. Now, my pretty signorette," added Petrero, bluntly, "I have nothing more to say."

"But the young English gentleman, Mr. De Vere?" inquired Antonia.

"I have not seen him since he left my house under your guidance last night. Perhaps he went straight to his hotel," added Petrero.

"Perhaps so!" ejaculated Antonia. "Now therefore you must have the goodness to inform me at what hotel Mr. De Vere is staying?"

Petrero named the establishment, and away sped Antonia to make further inquiries. She reached the hotel; and the answer she received to her question was the following:—"The gentleman went out last evening, immediately after partaking of his dinner; and he has not yet returned. You had better call again if you wish to see him."

The domestics at the hotel as yet thought it by no means singular that Charles De Vere had not returned; for it was not ten o'clock in the forenoon—and it seemed only too natural that he should be beguiled elsewhere by those attractions in which the city of Florence was by no means deficient.

Antonia hastened to retrace her way to the Mirano mansion. She glided up the private staircase—sought her own chamber—threw off her walking apparel—and was then speeding towards the suite of rooms where she had left Edgar Mar-

cellin, when she encountered Teresa, one of the maids specially attached to the service of the Marchioness.

"Ah, Antonia!" ejaculated Teresa; "I was looking for you! Her ladyship wishes to speak to you. She is in her boudoir."

"And when did her ladyship return?" inquired Antonia.

"Only within this quarter of an hour," rejoined Teresa. "But make haste, or the Marchioness may think that I have been remiss in seeking you."

Antonia accordingly turned her steps in another direction; and instead of immediately rejoining Edgar Marcellin, she bent her way towards the boudoir of Lucrezia di Mirano.

"It is fortunate that her ladyship has returned at this moment," thought Antonia to herself; "for I may thus perhaps be enabled to fulfil every portion of M. Marcellin's instructions. But what must I say? and how must I act? Ah! of course I must know that the Signora Ciprina has disappeared!—and in everything else I must be guided by circumstances."

In another minute Antonia stood in the presence of the Marchioness. The young girl had of course all along known that Lucrezia di Mirano was a profligate in respect to the sensual passions: but it was only on this memorable morning for the first time that she had learnt to look upon her as a being steeped to the lips in crime and whose soul was stained with the blackest iniquities. For an instant Antonia actually felt incredulous on the point. The Marchioness appeared so beautiful—there was such a sunny light in her large blue eyes—the hair of golden auburn was thrown back from a forehead so high, so pure, and so stainless, that it seemed to be the throne of the noblest thoughts,—there was such frankness and openness in the expression of her countenance, with the winning half-smile upon the beautifully formed lips—and there was such an air of perfect calmness and self-possession about this lady of extraordinary loveliness, that it actually seemed impossible to associate her with the blackest turpitude, or to look upon her as the personification of all the passions that might be supposed to concentrate in a fiend!

"How fares it with your mistress, my beloved friend the Signora Ciprina?" inquired the Marchioness.

"Alas, my lady!" replied Antonia, "my mistress has disappeared!"

"Disappeared!" ejaculated the Marchioness, as if seized with amazement and grief. "What mean you?"

"I mean, my lady," rejoined Antonia, "that the Signora Ciprina is not in her apartments——"

"Have you made any inquiries, or mentioned this to any of your fellow-servants?" demanded Lucrezia di Mirano.

"No, my lady. In the first place I have only just discovered that my mistress has disappeared—I did not like to be too sure—I thought I had better wait until your ladyship returned home——"

"You have behaved very discreetly, Antonia," interjected the Marchioness. "Ah! I think I understand wherefore? Yes, yes!—you are indeed a very prudent and good girl! Of course

you knew that the signora had a young gentleman secreted there—he was ill, or wounded, or something of that sort—and now that he is convalescent, I suppose that in mingled gratitude and love he has vowed to devote himself for the rest of his life to the young lady—and—perhaps they have fled together? Come, now—is it not so, Antonia?—and have I not read what is passing in your mind with a sufficient accuracy to save you the embarrassment of speaking in terms which you might conceive to be depreciatory of the Signora Ciprina?”

“Of course, my lady,” answered the young damsel, “I should not venture—I mean I should not permit myself—in short, the respect that I owe to my mistress—”

“Ah, then, I see my suspicions are correct!” exclaimed the Marchioness: “your mistress and the Frenchman have run away together? Doubtless they have their own good motives for such a course—But Ah! while I bethink me, Antonia, just have the kindness to hasten to the rooms lately tenanted by your mistress—and see if you find any masculine garments there—or any firearms. Indeed, I have some reason for supposing that your search will not be in vain: because I lent the Signora Ciprina my own suit of male apparel and a pistol, that she might visit a masquerade some nights back.”

“I will go and see, my lady,” responded Antonia.

“Ah! and in the meantime,” interjected the Marchioness, “you would perhaps do well to forbear from mentioning the circumstance to your fellow-servants until you and I may have agreed together how the tale can be best told so as to create as little scandal as possible.”

Antonia curtsied and issued from the boudoir. She hastened to the apartments where she had left Edgar Marcellin: she knocked at the outer door of the suite—he opened it—and the young damsel at once crossed the threshold.

“I have discovered the secret, Antonia!” ejaculated Marcellin, as he closed and locked the door by which she had just entered.

“What secret, signor?” she demanded. “Do you mean the private passage—”

“Yes! Look!” cried the Frenchman.

As he spoke he advanced towards the wainscot on the side against which Antonia had for a couple of nights made her bed; and pressing upon one of the gilt nails which embellished the panelling, Edgar cried, “Behold!”

A portion of the wainscot seemed all in an instant to give way, so strange was the appearance of a door opening where there was not a moment back the slightest evidence to show that a door was in existence. It opened into a passage, narrow and dark, and into which the eyes of Antonia could only plunge for some half-dozen yards.

“And how did you discover this, signor?” inquired the damsel.

“Oh!” ejaculated Marcellin, “I was determined to examine the wainscot well while you were gone: I thought that if there were any secret spring acting upon a hidden door, it might possibly be connected with one of these nails; and I experimentalised upon them till at last, lo and behold! that particular nail gave way beneath the touch, and the door opened!”

“And this passage, signor?” inquired Antonia. “I have explored it,” rejoined Marcellin; “it leads to a staircase which conducts down into a place where there is an issue by a door opening into the little stable-yard.”

“Ah!” cried Antonia. “I know there is a door in that yard. And thus, signor, you have discovered the grand secret?”

“Yes. But now tell me what you yourself have discovered?” exclaimed Marcellin.

“In the first place, signor, I have bad news in reference to Mr. De Vere—”

“Ah! bad news?” ejaculated Edgar.

“Yes. Mr. De Vere has not been heard of since he accompanied me from Signor Petrora’s house.”

“Ah! then, treachery has overtaken him!” cried Marcellin: “but by heaven!—”

“Stop, signor!” interposed Antonia. “I have an idea—something has struck me! But in the first place let me tell you that the Marchioness has come back—and she evidently thinks that you have left with the Signora Ciprina!”

“Ah! she thinks that?” cried Marcellin.

“Yes, signor! And now it is my idea that the wrong person has been carried off!” rejoined Antonia.

“Good heavens! this is possible! Nay, more—it is probable!” exclaimed Edgar; “and it never struck me before! Yes, yes—I see it all! The Marchioness thought to get rid of me and Ciprina at one and the same time: but an error has been committed—”

“There can be no doubt of it, signor!” said the damsel: “the discourse of the Marchioness fully proved that such is the case. And now she has sent me to look for certain articles of male raiment and a pistol—”

“Ah!” exclaimed Edgar; “if there had existed the slightest possibility of doubt in reference to the motives of Lucrezia Mirano, it is now cleared up! Yes, yes! she flatters herself that these rooms are empty now, and that she has naught to do but to send you hither to fetch away those articles which help to serve as the evidences of her crime.”

“And what will you do, signor?” inquired Antonia.

“I will depart at once,” responded Marcellin. “The secret passage shall now serve my purpose! I can lock the ante-room door inside—and you can return to the Marchioness and assure her that you are unable to enter the suite of apartments. I shall thus gain time, and also guard against any sudden surprise on her part: for at any moment is she capable of coming hither to seek after you.”

“Ah! I forgot to mention one thing, signor,” said the damsel. “The man Petrora has heard from Signor Paoli; and that unfortunate father of the murdered Giulio will be at Petrora’s house to-morrow night at eight o’clock.”

“Oh, this is indeed welcome intelligence!” exclaimed Marcellin. “Rest assured, Antonia, that things are now taking a turn, and the triumph of Lucrezia di Mirano shall be speedily brought to a termination! But come—hasten to assist me! Is there no convenient little carpet-bag or portmanteau, which I might carry in my hand through the streets, with the air of a traveller—”



"Yes!" ejaculated Antonia: "there is a little portable leathern travelling case! Ah, here it is!"

"Excellent!" cried Edgar. "Now, my pretty little assistant, fetch those articles of male apparel from the wardrobe yonder—Ah! and the pistol is on the same shelf!"

"I have them," said Antonia: and then, with the utmost despatch, the good-natured, willing girl proceeded to pack those articles in the leathern case.

"I am now ready," said Marcellin, putting on his travelling cap and throwing his cloak over his shoulders. "Here, my pretty damsel, accept this slight token of my gratitude for your attentions and kindnesses:"—and he endeavoured to thrust ten or a dozen pieces of gold into Antonia's hand.

"No, signor," she replied; "this is a case in which I cannot receive a reward the acceptance

whereof might seem to indicate that I had acted only with a view to a bribe."

"Nonsense, Antonia!" exclaimed the Frenchman: "take the gold or I shall be offended. If the opportunity should serve, you will soon reap a still better recompense."

"Do you mean, signor," asked Antonia eagerly, "in being restored to the service of my beloved mistress the Signora Cipriota?"

"That is what I mean, Antonia. She is incapable of forgetting you!" exclaimed Marcellin. "And now, my dear girl, farewell."

The outer door of the ante-room was speedily unlocked: and Edgar could not resist the opportunity of imprinting a kiss upon the cherry lips of Antonia, who was a pretty and genteel-looking girl. In spite of her devotion to her mistress, she received the kiss with no particular amount of indignation, and as if she did not fancy she was

countenancing any very serious degree of infidelity on the part of the young Frenchman towards that absent lady. She then crossed the threshold; and Edgar Marcellin locked the door behind her.

Edgar, carrying the little leathern portmanteau in his hand, entered the secret passage, closing the door behind him. He groped his way along; for he was involved in pitchy darkness—and this time he had not cared to bring a lamp with him, inasmuch as scarcely an hour had elapsed since he had explored it thoroughly by the aid of a light. He reached the spiral staircase—he descended it—and now he found himself close by the door leading into one of the stable-yards. In respect to this door he had already made up his mind how to act; for the lock was not let into the thickness of the wood, but was screwed on to the inner surface of the door itself; and it had one of those round bolts shooting into a massive circular staple, such as may often be seen in old buildings in Italy. Now, the simple removal of the lock or of the staple was the only step to be accomplished for the attainment of freedom from amidst the perils with which the very atmosphere itself in that accursed mansion seemed to be laden. Marcellin had brought with him from Ciprina's suite of apartments a sharp-pointed poker belonging to an iron stove; and he had no fear of being unable to effect his purpose.

But let us return to Antonia. The young girl had just issued forth from the ante-room, with a blush upon her cheeks, and yet with a smile upon the lips where the handsome Edgar Marcellin had imprinted a kiss. She was speeding back to the boudoir of the Marchioness, when from a diverging passage that lady herself suddenly appeared. We may here incidentally throw in the observation that Lucrezia di Mirano had all in a moment fancied it would be better if she herself repaired in person to Ciprina's apartments to procure the articles of raiment and the pistol; for she was not quite sure to what an extent Antonia might be in the confidence of Ciprina, or how the young damsel might have listened to any discourse which had taken place between her mistress and Edgar Marcellin. And then too, the Marchioness was anxious to ascertain whether either of them had left behind any papers—such as letters or memoranda—which might contain allusions calculated to compromise herself. Thus was it that as an afterthought Lucrezia di Mirano determined upon following so closely on the heels of Antonia.

"Ah, I was coming to join you in those rooms," said the Marchioness. "I thought that I would see if there were any traces or clue to be discovered in respect to the destination taken by the Signora Ciprina, as I really should like to write to her. Or she may have left a billet for me on her toilet table? But where are the articles I sent you for?"

"I have not got them, my lady," responded Antonia.

"Not got them?" ejaculated the Marchioness.

"No, my lady," rejoined Antonia. "I cannot get into the rooms again."

"Not get into the rooms? this is ridiculous! How did you first find out that your mistress and her lover had fled, unless you had been enabled to penetrate into the apartments——"

"Ah, true!" responded Antonia, who saw that the present proceedings were involving her in

some little contradiction with other statements "Yea—I was able to penetrate into the rooms just now—I mean before I saw your ladyship in your boudoir; and therefore I suppose some accident must have happened to the lock when I drew the door after me."

"Indeed?" said the Marchioness, fixing a look full of suspicion upon Antonia's countenance. "We shall see. Remain with me, girl."

Lucrezia di Mirano passed rapidly on towards the door of the ante-room: she found it fastened—she stooped down—peeped—and saw that the key was in the lock. How on earth could this happen? There were only two ways of accounting for the circumstance,—either that there was some one still within those apartments who had locked the door behind Antonia after she had issued forth; or else that the secret passage had been discovered and made use of by some one in addition to the police on the preceding night.

"The key is in the lock," said the Marchioness, again fixing her looks searchingly and suspiciously upon the young damsel. "Is any one in those rooms?"

"No one, my lady," replied Antonia, steadily meeting the gaze that was thus riveted upon her.

"And did you leave the apartment by this door?" demanded the Marchioness. "If so, how came it locked behind you, and the key on the other side? Ah! you look confused!—you are seeking for an answer!—you are endeavouring to make up a tale in your mind—and you cannot! Come with me."

Antonia was not exactly afraid of the Marchioness; but she was now acting submissively in order that she might not foster suspicions that were already engendered, but that on the other hand she might ensure Edgar Marcellin a sufficient interval to make his escape altogether from the precincts of a mansion where malevolence at any moment might, as a last desperate resource, turn round and give him into custody on the fatal charge of being the murderer of Giulio. In order, therefore, to provoke the suspicions of the Marchioness as little as might be, and lull her into as great a sense of security as possible, Antonia followed with a submissive air. The Marchioness hastily led the way to her boudoir; and thrusting Antonia into that room, she exclaimed, "Remain here, deceitful girl! and at your peril do ought to raise an alarm! I shall return in a few minutes."

Lucrezia di Mirano then locked the door—secured the key about her person—and bent her rapid steps towards the private back staircase which led into the vestibule where Edgar Marcellin had encountered Signor Paoli on the memorable night that had led to so many startling incidents and grave complications. From that vestibule the Marchioness now passed into a corridor, and thence by a private door into the small yard belonging to the stable where her favourite riding-horse was kept. A glance thrown round the premises, showed Lucrezia that no one was nigh at the moment; and she hastily turned her steps towards the little low door which on a former occasion we have described as being set in the solid brickwork forming the basement-part of the mansion. She placed the key in the lock—she

opened the door—and as the light of day streamed fully into the cellar-like place from which the spiral staircase led up, she found herself confronted by Edgar Marcellin!

CHAPTER XVI.

EDGAR AND LUCREZIA.

THE recognition was instantaneous; and a shriek of terror as well as of wild amazement was about to burst forth from the lips of Lucrezia di Milano, when Edgar, dropping the little iron instrument with which he had been on the very point of forcing off either the lock or the staple, when he heard a key grating in that lock, seized the Marchioness by the throat. He dragged her into the place; and as he released his hold upon her beautiful white neck, he said in a stern threatening voice, "Dare to raise an alarm, and I will mercilessly strangle you!"

"That wretch Antonia!" muttered Lucrezia, in accents which though low, were fiercely enraged and bitterly vindictive.

Edgar's keen ear caught the words: but he at the moment was occupied in taking a very necessary precaution. He was extricating the key from the lock on the outer side of the door, so that he might fasten it *inside*: and this he did in two or three instants. Total darkness again prevailed in that place.

"Now, signora," said Marcellin, quickly turning round, seizing upon Lucrezia again, and speaking in stern menacing accents as before, "let me repeat my warning. Dare cry out—dare attempt to raise an alarm—and I will throttle you!"

The Marchioness was almost annihilated, so to speak. She had fancied that Marcellin was by this time far away in some Apennine fortress: but here she had not only met him face to face, but she was now completely in his power! What, then, had happened during the past night?—how was it that Count Ramorino, the Minister of Police, had sent her a letter at an early hour in the morning, containing the assurance that his promise had been fulfilled, and that Ciprina and her lover, having been arrested according to the understanding with the Marchioness, had been sent off into a secure captivity? That Ramorino had not wilfully deceived her, the Marchioness felt assured: but yet Edgar Marcellin was *here*! All was mystery and bewilderment; and as Lucrezia endeavoured to collect her remembrances and arrange her confused ideas, she could find no possible mode of accounting for the incident that was now so wildly perplexing her.

"You here, M. Marcellin?" she ejaculated. "Do not grasp me thus tightly!—do not ill-treat me! What do you require of me?—why do we seem to be enemies?"

"Woman! vile woman!" exclaimed Edgar; "am I not still suffering from the wound produced by your murderous weapon?"

"But why did you seek me at the time under circumstances so suspicious?" asked Lucrezia: "why send for me to the picture-gallery in a way that was only too well calculated to make me

apprehend that some treachery was impending? Why——"

"Oh! it is not for you to ask questions!" exclaimed Edgar, with an accent of rage in his voice as he thought of how nearly he had been sent down to the grave by the assassin hand of that woman. "Rather let me ask why you have plunged so deeply into the vortex of crime—why you murdered the unfortunate Giulio——"

"'Tis false!" exclaimed the Marchioness vehemently: "I did not do it! Your's was the crime!"

"Ah, this is too much!" ejaculated the young Frenchman, his hand tightening upon the arm which it had grasped the moment after he had locked the door and secured the key about his person. "Dare to repeat the accusation, and by heaven! I will not wait for the operation of the law!—but I will inflict a condign punishment here!"

"Mercy, M. Marcellin!" implored the affrighted Lucrezia: "would you murder me? Oh, unhand me! Your fingers tighten like an iron vice upon my arm! Let us go forth into the light! It is horrible to be here together in the dark—and you hating me as bitterly as you do!"

"No—we will not go forth into the light," responded Edgar, in a stern voice. "I know what you would do—I fathom your aims! You would give me into custody on this false charge which you infernally devised against me! But this shall not be! It is I who am to conquer now—and the hour of that triumph as well as of retribution is not far distant! You ask me to release my hold upon your arm? There! I now grasp your wrist. But beware how you attempt the slightest treachery: for if I do but bear a suspicious movement on your part, I will strike you down with an iron instrument that I had provided for the breaking open of this door!"

"Is it not possible," asked Lucrezia, driven to desperation and goaded almost to madness,—"is it not possible that we can arrive at some understanding? Oh let it be so!"

"Do you confess, then," demanded Edgar, "that it was really you who assassinated the unfortunate Giulio Paoli?"

"No! no! ten thousand times no!" exclaimed the Marchioness.

"Speak not so loud!" said Edgar sternly; and his grasp tightened upon her wrist. "What! vile woman! do you dare deny that through the darkness which her prevails, you behold the form of the murdered Giulio? or do you deny that the conviction is deep in your own heart that you are already as infamous as your prototype Lucrezia Borgia? or again, dare you deny that you deal with the subtle poison as well as with the sharp-pointed dagger? Ah, vile woman! I know more than you think! Yes—I know that you penetrated into the room above, one night, when I slept and you thought that Ciprina was sleeping——"

"Ah, Ciprina?" ejaculated the Marchioness. "You have lost her—have you not?"

"I do not ask you to tell me what has become of her," rejoined Edgar; "for I know that you would deceive me. But I have full faith in the progress of justice; and I know that retribution will overtake you—while, on the other hand,

Ciprina shall triumph along with myself. Yet, Ah! an idea strikes me! there shall not be another victim, if I can help it, to your vindictive rage. You are now spoke the name of Antonia——"

"Antonia?" echoed the Marchioness.

"Yes—Antonia," repeated Edgar with emphasis. "There was malignity in the way in which you muttered that name; and as I am a living man! the poor girl shall not suffer on account of her fidelity to her mistress or her attention towards me!"

"If we may come to terms with each other, M. Marcellin—Oh, if we may come to amicable terms, I repeat," exclaimed Lucrezia, in a voice of impassioned entreaty, "you will have no need to tremble on account of Ciprina whom you love, or Antonia whose interests you consider yourself bound to defend! Come—is it impossible for us to establish a treaty of peace—to forget all accusations and recriminations——"

"Enough! enough!" exclaimed Marcellin. "Too much time has already been wasted in a discourse which hitherto has led to nothing! You will have the kindness to ascend this staircase."

"For what purpose do you mean to retrace your way?" asked Lucrezia.

"No matter," responded Marcellin. "Obey me. Proceed. I hate to use unmanly threats towards a woman: but rest assured that I possess the means of enforcing compliance with my mandates!"

The Marchioness di Mirano began to ascend the spiral staircase,—Edgar Marcellin following, with one hand still holding her wrist, the other hand grasping the iron instrument whereunto allusion has already been made — and the little portmanteau thrown over his shoulder. We may observe that he was careful to retain a hold upon the Marchioness for a twofold reason: in the first place to be enabled to form some idea of her movements, so as to guard against any sudden treachery in the depth of that darkness—and in the second place to prevent her abruptly bounding forward, outstripping him, and thus escaping from his power.

As for the Marchioness herself,—she scarcely knew what to think, or what plan to adopt. She could not conjecture how Edgar Marcellin purposed to proceed after he should have left the mansion,—whether he had resolved upon measures to be promptly taken, or whether he meant yet to wait awhile for some reason or another. Perhaps he intended to institute a search after Ciprina before he did anything else? But uncertainty and bewilderment in every sense filled the brain of the wretched Marchioness; and not the least painful source of perplexity was the constantly recurring question, how Edgar Marcellin happened to be there at all?—whether he had escaped after being arrested—whether some one else had chanced to be captured in his place—whether she had been deceived by Ramorino—or whether the Minister was himself deceived by his underlings to whom the affair had been entrusted? To attempt to analyse, however, all the conflicting conjectures and bewildering ideas which now agitated in the mind of the Marchioness of Mirano, would occupy whole pages; and therefore we must leave much upon this point to the imagination of the reader.

Lucrezia continued to ascend the spiral stone staircase, closely followed by Edgar Marcellin, who still clutched her by the wrist. The passage was reached—it was threaded—and in a few moments the Marchioness stopped short at the extremity.

"Open that door," was Edgar's imperiously uttered command; "or else I will do it: for, as you may suppose, I have discovered the secret spring."

The Marchioness touched the iron knob; and the door flew open. She stepped into the ante-room, Edgar following her. He made her pass through the boudoir into Ciprina's chamber—or rather, we should say, the one which Ciprina used to occupy; and then suddenly extending his arm towards the picture of Lucrezia Borgia, he exclaimed, "Behold the likeness of your prototype!"

A visible shudder passed over the superb form of the Marchioness di Mirano—and her cheeks, which were already very pale by the incidents of the last few minutes, grew absolutely ghastly. But almost immediately regaining her self-possession, she said, "M. Marcellin, you labour under more than one strangely erroneous impression with regard to me."

The young Frenchman could not help gazing for a few moments in astonishment upon this woman who was enabled to assume so bold a hardihood. Lucrezia mistook that feeling of astonishment on his part for another sentiment: she thought that he was contemplating her with admiration. An idea struck her; and a smile overspread her countenance as suddenly as the April sunbeams bursting from behind a cloud, shed their radiance upon the lake which a moment before was covered with a dark shadow.

"Oh, M. Marcellin!" said Lucrezia, in the most dulcet tones of her deliciously harmonious voice; "you and I were not formed to be enemies! There have been terrible misunderstandings between us; and these misunderstandings have led to serious occurrences. But let us think no more of all this! Let there be peace between us! Oh, Edgar!—for thus familiarly will I now address you—you know that I am rich—immensely rich!—that I possess this palatial mansion—a villa in the Vale of Arno—and a chateau in one of the most delightful of our Tuscan provinces! Oh, how happily might you live with me! I would make you the master of all my wealth!—no matrimonial bond need shackle you—but yet would I prove obedient and docile unto you as if you had veritably all the power and authority of a husband! Or if you still love Ciprina," continued the Marchioness, as she perceived no encouraging look on Edgar's countenance, "I will give you my villa in the Vale of Arno—and there ye shall dwell together, and my treasures shall still be at your command! You do not answer me?"

"I am reflecting," said Marcellin, "upon the two distinct propositions which your ladyship has just made."

"Your ladyship!" thought the Marchioness to herself: "he is growing respectful! Just now it was *Woman*! or even *Vile woman*! Ah, perhaps I may yet conquer!"

"Proceed," said the young Frenchman: "methinks your ladyship has yet some farther observations to make."

"We are speaking within four walls," resumed Lucrezia,—"beyond which nothing can transpire, and within which no voices but our own can be heard. But still you must not suppose that it is through any fear of your ulterior measures that I am making propositions or seeking to come to terms. Nothing of the sort! I have naught to apprehend. But at the same time it is odious and horrible to be thus at war with one's fellow-creatures!"

"Yes—odious and horrible," said Marcellin. "But if I were disposed to accept either of your ladyship's propositions—what guarantee can you offer me——"

"What guarantee do you require or demand?" asked Lucrezia eagerly.

"In the first place," responded Edgar, "that you summon the girl Antonia hither so that I may at once receive a proof of your good faith and friendly intentions, by hearing you proclaim your forgiveness of any grievances, real or imaginary, which you may have against her."

"Ah! that is quickly done!" ejaculated the Marchioness. "I will hasten and fetch Antonia hither!"

"But why not ring one of these bells?" demanded Edgar. "It would be her business to respond to such a summons."

Lucrezia looked confused; and she rapidly sought in her mind for some pretext or excuse in this new emergency which had just arisen.

"Ah!" said Marcellin; "I see that I cannot trust you! At the very moment when I was about to yield to your overtures for peace, you refuse me that slight and simple proof of your good faith which it is so necessary for me to acquire under existing circumstances!"

"No—I do not refuse that proof of my good faith!" ejaculated the Marchioness. "But I will deal frankly with you; and then you shall judge whether these overtures of mine are made in earnest or otherwise!"

"Yes—let us deal frankly with each other!" replied Marcellin; "for heaven knows there has been too much dissimulation and underground work—too much mining and countermining——"

"And all this shall cease!" cried Lucrezia, while joy went on expanding in her heart as she fancied that each succeeding moment afforded an additional proof of Edgar Marcellin's willingness to conclude a treaty of peace. "The only reason why I hesitated in respect to Antonia, is this—that she is in my boudoir!"

"Let us ring all the same," interjected Marcellin: "some one else will answer the summons—and then we will send for Antonia. Ah, by heaven! even this proposition does not please you!—a shade comes over your countenance! Now, will you still have me believe that you are dealing frankly, and that you wish for peace?"

"Oh, leap not to such hasty conclusions!" cried the Marchioness. "I really mean to deal frankly—as I hope that you likewise do! In a word, therefore, Antonia is locked in my boudoir——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Edgar. "And the key?"

"I have it about my person," was the response.

"Then, as an additional guarantee," said Marcellin, whose handsome countenance now under-

went a sudden change, "you must permit me to bind you."

"To bind me?" echoed the Marchioness, in accents of affright.

"Yes—to bind you!" repeated Edgar. "It is a mere ceremony—an idle form—quite harmless, you know!"—and while thus speaking, he was taking forth shawls and kerchiefs from Ciprina's drawers.

All in a moment the Marchioness darted forth from the chamber, her object being to rush towards the outer door of the suite and make her escape from Edgar Marcellin's power. But quick as lightning was the young Frenchman upon her track: he seized upon her—he dragged her back into that chamber from which she had sought to flee. Her countenance was white with rage: it was a look of demoniac wickedness which she bent upon Edgar Marcellin. Oh! then indeed she seemed to be of a fearful beauty—the personification of all the worst passions that are known to the human heart,—as on that memorable night when she stood before Ciprina in the portrait-gallery, with the dagger in her hand and the bleeding form of Edgar Marcellin at her feet.

But the young Frenchman recked not for her vindictive regards; and brandishing the iron weapon in a menacing manner, he commanded her to kneel. She was now afraid!—yes, once again she was full of the direst apprehension; for there was the light of a firm and resolute purpose shining in the handsome eyes of Edgar Marcellin. He proceeded to bind her wrists behind her back with Ciprina's kerchiefs: but he bound her not in such a manner as actually to hurt her: his object was simply to render her powerless for a certain time. He then fastened her in such a manner to a solid marble pillar belonging to an alcove, that she could not reach the bell-pull. Having thus taken his measures so far as the security of the Marchioness was concerned, he searched in her pocket for the key of her boudoir; and on finding it, he said, "You will be wise if you follow the counsel which I have to give; and this is, that you attempt not to raise any alarm—for I shall not be very far distant nor very long absent; and if cries so reach my ears, depend upon it I shall hurry back quickly and show you no mercy."

Edgar Marcellin then proceeded into the ante-room, closing the intermediate doors in order the more effectually to drown the cries of the Marchioness in case she should disregard his warning. Passing forth by the outer door of the suite, he locked it behind him, securing the key about his person. He thence proceeded straight to Lucrezia's boudoir: for not merely had he been to that boudoir before, on the night when he possessed himself of the garments and the pistol, but moreover he was intimately acquainted with all the principal turnings and windings of the mansion, thanks to the information which he had received from Lisetta in London. In a few moments he reached the boudoir of the Marchioness, having fortunately encountered no one on the way. The key which he had taken from about the person of Lucrezia, proved to be that which he had required; and thus in another moment he found himself in the presence of Antonia. The young girl gave utterance to a cry of joy as she bounded towards him; and if it were stifled some-

what summarily, the reader may rest assured that it was by no process more violent than that of the application of the handsome Frenchman's lips. A few rapid explanations were exchanged, — Antonia stating what had last happened betwixt herself and the Marchioness—and Edgar, on the other hand, informing the astonished damsel how Lucrezia had become his prisoner.

"You must now go with me, Antonia," said Marcellin.

"Go with you, signor!" exclaimed the girl, her countenance lighting up with pleasure.

"Yes, I cannot think of leaving you to the malignity and vindictiveness of this vile woman. Besides, her knell will soon ring now: for it is clear as heaven's own blessed sun itself, that each successive circumstance draws the web of her own iniquities more closely in around her. Yes! you must come with me, Antonia. Be quick—put together what necessities you may choose to take—"

"Oh, I will not be many minutes, signor!" she ejaculated: and she was already tripping with her dainty feet towards the door, when bethinking herself of something, she turned back to ask, "Where am I to rejoin you?"

"In the Signora Ciprina's apartments," responded Marcellin: "for we will issue forth by the secret passage. But Ah! a thought has struck me! You shall rejoin me here. As well wait in one place as another!—and during the delay I may possibly make some good use of the time."

Antonia flitted forth from the boudoir, while Edgar Marcellin instantaneously appeared to be intent on a general search or "rummage." He opened drawers wherever he could find them; and then he laid his hands upon an elegant writing-desk which stood upon a side-table. The desk was locked; but he unhesitatingly wrenched it open,—muttering to himself, "I feel as if I were an officer of justice, having a right to search everything and everywhere! Who knows what may turn up? Who can tell what additional evidence may transpire? Ah! what is that? A phial? Yes!—wrapped in a piece of paper! Ah, and writing on that paper! A name! Well, I shall not forget it! But better still—I will take both phial and wrapper with me! And now, amongst all these notes and billets, may there not be something to serve as a link—something of a compromising character? No! fie upon thee, Edgar Marcellin! These are naught but love-billets—and the amatory secrets even of such a wretch as Lucrezia di Mirano ought to be secured!"

The young Frenchman was thus checked in the midst of his search by a chivalrous feeling which was natural enough for one of his peculiarly lofty-minded nation. He had snatched up a handful of notes that lay in the desk—he was just on the point of thrusting them back again, when his eye caught sight of a name at the bottom of one of those letters.

"Ah! Ramorino!" he said: "this may be important! By heavens there shall be no scruple nor false delicacy here!"

He accordingly ran his eyes over the letter, the contents of which were brief—but they were evidently of a certain degree of consequence, for Marcellin at once consigned the document to the

same pocket to which he had already conveyed the phial and the piece of paper that enveloped it. Scarcely was this proceeding finished, when Antonia reappeared, now dressed in walking-costume and carrying a package under her mantle.

"Oh, signor," she ejaculated, as she beheld the drawers gaping wide open, and the desk seeming to indicate that its mysteries had been violated; "you have indeed made the best use of your time!"

"And perhaps not altogether without effect," rejoined Marcellin quickly. "But come! let us depart!"

"I am ready," said Antonia; and they accordingly issued forth from the boudoir.

Equally fortunate as he was while coming thither, Edgar Marcellin encountered no one on his way back to the suite of apartments where he had left the Marchioness of Mirano. On entering the ante-room by aid of the key which he had taken with him, he unlocked the door, and again secured the key about his person.

"Where is the Marchioness?" asked Antonia, not without a slight apprehension lest that formidable lady should suddenly make her appearance, free from her bonds, and ready as well as powerful for fresh mischief.

"In the room which your mistress used to occupy since I came here," responded Marcellin.

"And why do you take that key, signor?" was Antonia's next question.

"Oh, you shall know hereafter, my dear girl!" rejoined Edgar. "But, by the bye, as I have a particular aversion to the chance of being handed over to the police before all my combinations are made and my plans ripe, we will just assure ourselves that the Marchioness is still tightly bound. Besides, I have my portmanteau to fetch!"

"Oh, do permit me, signor, to remain here in the meantime!" said Antonia entreatingly: "for I do not know how it is, but since I have learnt all the wickedness of this Marchioness, I experience a horrible dread of her, just for all the world as if she had thrown off a beautiful mask and displayed the head of a snake with the forked tongue playing between its livid jaws."

"Remain you here then, Antonia," said Marcellin: and as he proceeded towards the inner chamber, he muttered to himself, "By heaven! the girl has, without any studied flourish of rhetoric, afforded a most admirable simile in respect to this vile woman!"

He entered the chamber where he had left her; and a glance showed him that she was still securely bound. It was not now a look replete with mischief nor full of demoniac passion, which Lucrezia cast up towards the young Frenchman: but it was one in which all the dissimulation of her nature poured itself forth, as it were, in an expression of anguished entreaty. But that she had struggled desperately to release herself during the time she had been left alone, was evident from the disordered state of her toilet. Her bodice had burst open—her superb bosom was all exposed—and the traces of tears were on her cheeks, as if in her rage she had wept at the impotency of her endeavours to free herself from the bonds.

"Oh, Edgar!" she murmured, "can you be so cruel? What can I do to move you? Release me! Say that there shall be peace between us—"

I will give you half my fortune—and these arms which you have bound shall be thrown lovingly about your neck!"

"Cease, woman!" interjected Marcellin. "Do you not already feel that your hour is past and that mine is now at hand?"

"But, Oh! the stratagem to which you had recourse was most abominable!" cried the Marchioness, unable to restrain her rage. "While you were pretending to make terms of peace, you were meditating fresh treacheries!"

"We are at war, signora," exclaimed Edgar; "and everything is fair in a state of hostility. Why do you think I brought you hither from the dark places which we threaded? It was to bind you! You, by your own folly, suffered me to learn where Antonia was: otherwise my course would have been a difficult one—for I should have been compelled to search for her throughout the mansion—and I had resolved not to leave it without ensuring the safety of that young girl. Ah! you are in every sense beaten!"

Thus speaking, Edgar Marcellin caught up his portmanteau and again slung it over his shoulders.

"But is it possible," cried the miserable Lucrezia, "that you will leave me here—bound as I am—"

"I do not wish to be unnecessarily cruel," interrupted Marcellin; "and therefore I will at once inform you that your captivity will not last very long. So soon as my own security is provided for, I shall adopt measures to cause you to be set at liberty."

"Edgar, I entreat—I implore—by everything sacred I adjure you—"

But the young Frenchman tarried to hear no more of Lucrezia's passionate exclamations: he quitted the chamber, again closing the door behind him. In a few moments he rejoined Antonia.

"Now, my dear girl," he said, "let us depart!"—at the same time he pressed the gilt button in the wainscot, and the secret door flew open.

He and his fair companion passed into the stone corridor; and Marcellin shut that private door which gave them admission thither. Being by this time well acquainted with the dark passage, he guided Antonia by the hand; and the spiral staircase was soon reached. They descended it: they gained the bottom.

"Now one moment," said Marcellin; "for I possess the key!"

He opened the door gently, and peeped into the stable-yard. No one was to be seen; and he issued forth, followed by his fair companion. But scarcely had he shut the door and put the key in his pocket, when a middle-aged man in the dress of a groom emerged from the stable.

"Ah, Bernardo!" ejaculated Antonia.

"What! Bernardo?" cried Marcellin. "This, then, is most fortunate!"

The man looked astonished at the appearance of these two persons from a door which he never remembered to have seen opened before, and which led he knew not whither, unless it were to some unused cellar in the basement of the mansion. But at the same time he respectfully saluted the young Frenchman.

"My worthy fellow," said Edgar, "do you know me?"

"Yes, signor, to be sure!" was the response. "You used to visit at the mansion about a year back or so—You are Signor Marcellin?"

The young Frenchman knew perfectly well that the Marchioness di Mirano had not publicly accused him of being the murderer of Giulio Paoli; and he now at once perceived, by the groom's respectful demeanour, that no hint to so calamitous an effect had been dropped by Lucrezia in his hearing. It was therefore with all the greater amount of confidence that he proceeded to address the groom.

"Your name is Bernardo?" he said; "and you have the special care of her ladyship's favourite riding-horse?"

"Yes, signor," replied the man, wondering why he was thus particularly and sententially apostrophised.

"And you remember," continued Marcellin, "a certain young female who used to be in the service of the Marchioness di Mirano?—I mean Lisetta?"

"Oh, yes, signor!—a very nice young dame!—and it gave me great pain when she suddenly left her ladyship's service—although, for the matter of that, there was nothing more betwixt myself and the pretty Lisetta than—"

"One word with you!" interrupted Edgar. "I require a groom, to whom I will give just three times the amount of wages that you receive here, whatever that amount may be. Are you agreeable? You hesitate—"

"No, signor," replied Bernardo, as if suddenly galvanized into the necessity of giving a positive response. "Offers such as this do not admit of much hesitation!"

"One word!"—and Marcellin drew the groom aside.

He put a few pieces of gold into the man's hand, and questioned him upon a subject to which we need not now more particularly allude. At the expiration of some minutes, Antonia, who stood at a little distance, perceived that the young Frenchman had gained his point, whatever it were, for his countenance expressed the utmost satisfaction. He resigned his portmanteau to Bernardo; and he said to Antonia, "Go forward with him—and I will follow at a little distance."

The dame obeyed. Bernardo opened a door leading into the bye-street which ran along that part of the premises attached to the Mirano mansion; and Edgar, drawing his travelling-cap over his countenance, followed them at an interval of about fifty yards.

"I must be cautious," he muttered to himself; "for if that unprincipled Chief of Police, Ramorino, who is evidently more or less devoted to the Marchioness, should happen to have given any particular instructions to his *abinieri*, I might be arrested just at the very moment when it is so highly important for me to remain at large!"

Bernardo and Antonia continued their way together, threading divers streets—but the former evidently knowing to what destination he was to proceed. In about ten minutes they reached the French Ambassador's mansion; and there they were joined by Marcellin, who had pursued his own way without experiencing any molestation. He sent up his card to the Ambassador, who at once received him. Marcellin was closeted with

his Excellency for about half-an-hour—at the expiration of which interval he was conducted to a suite of apartments, which he was requested to consider his own. Bernardo and Antonia were then summoned to Edgar's presence; and he said to them, "Here you may remain—and here you are safe. It were better if you both kept within doors until you receive from me an intimation that you may breathe the fresh air again. I need not inform you that on all those subjects on which I have spoken to either of you, you must remain silent when in conversation with any of the domestics in his Excellency's establishment."

Bernardo and Antonia both promised to fulfil Edgar Marcellin's bidding; and he then dismissed them to the rooms which were provided for their own reception.

Now, be it recollected that all these incidents took place somewhat early in the morning of the day after the carrying-off of Charles De Vere and Ciprina; so that it was by this time little more than half-past eleven o'clock in the forenoon. Edgar at once called for, and took his way to the dwelling of La Dolina. He rang at the bell; and that woman herself quickly answered the summons. Marcellin said that he wished to speak to her on particular business; and she conducted him up into that room which has already been described to the reader; but it was only a glance of contempt which Marcellin flung upon the grim-looking skeleton and all the other horrors that were accumulated in the apartment. La Dolina, thinking that the handsome young stranger came to consult her on some subject in which her own special arts or avocations were interested, was proceeding with due gravity to seat herself at the table covered with black cloth; but Marcellin stopped her, saying, "No! we may as well converse in the middle of the room, and without any recourse to those mummeries which I can assure you have no influence with me."

La Dolina flung upon him an uneasy glance; for it took very little to trouble a conscience which for many obvious reasons was never particularly at ease: but Marcellin at once exclaimed, "I lie under an obligation to you—and I shall not willingly do you a mischief."

The woman felt reassured, and smiled—though she wondered how it was possible that the handsome stranger could be indebted to her.

"Yes—it is as I say," he continued. "Perhaps you know a young lady who has visited you twice to procure salves and potions?"

"Ah, yes!" ejaculated the woman. "Salves and potions for a young gentleman who was dangerously wounded with a dagger?"

"I am he," said Marcellin; "and though not quite so strong as I was, yet sufficiently recovered, as you may perceive, to attend to the important matters which I have on hand. The young lady of whom I speak——"

"The Signora Ciprina?" ejaculated the woman.

"Yes. And you informed her that the Marchioness di Mirano was a customer of yours after a certain fashion?"

"Oh, no, signor! nothing of the sort!" cried La Dolina, now terribly affrighted. "Some confidential discourse did assuredly take place between the Signora Ciprina and myself; but she had no right—in short, if she dared say——"

"Woman," interrupted Marcellin, "no evasions will serve with me; for I know everything!"

"Then who are you, signor?" asked La Dolina, evidently uncertain whether to regard him as a friend or an enemy.

"I am one whose life you saved twice," was the response; "and therefore I am not ungrateful. Yes!—you saved my life by means of your salves and potions—and you saved it also by means of the antidote which you disposed of to the Signora Ciprina. However detestable the exercise of your avocations may in one sense be, yet I cannot forget that in another sense your skill has been practised for a good purpose. You see, therefore, that I have no hostility against you—but that on the contrary, I come to serve you, and at the same time to serve myself."

"Speak, signor," said the woman. "I am grateful for these assurances."

"Will you still deny," resumed Marcellin, "that you sold poison to the Marchioness di Mirano?"

"Yes! that I must assuredly deny!" she answered, with a look of hardihood, which however lasted only for an instant, because the next moment her glances quailed beneath the keen scrutinizing gaze which the handsome eyes of Marcellin riveted upon her.

"This is useless!" he exclaimed. "Behold! here is a phial which has been found in the desk of the Marchioness di Mirano! It still contains a small quantity of fluid—this fluid shall be analyzed—and I have no doubt it will be proved——"

"And let the chemists prove it to be poison," ejaculated the woman boldly,—“who shall dare say 'twas I that sold it to the Marchioness?"

"I say it," responded Marcellin. "Do you require a proof? It was enveloped in the outside of a letter addressed to yourself. Behold! here is that envelope! Now, who could have wrapped the bottle in this paper except you in whose possession that paper was?"

La Dolina trembled: she looked very much confused; and Marcellin ejaculated, "All subterfuge is vain! all falsehood is futile! The proofs are incontestable! I forgive you for seeking to screen yourself: but I shall not be any longer willing to vouchsafe this pardon unless you at once confess——"

"And what, signor, do you mean to do?" asked La Dolina, now shaking as if with the palsy.

"I mean to make the discovery available for my own purposes," rejoined Marcellin; "but yet I will at the same time screen you. Not—not exactly screen you; but I will enable you to escape from the consequences of the explosion which must inevitably take place."

"Ah, signor! I perceive that I am at your mercy," cried the woman. "But, Oh! how can you perform what you say?"

"I will do it," rejoined Marcellin. "Yes—I will save you, because you have twice saved my life; and on one of those occasions you at the same time saved the life of the Signora Ciprina! Come with me."

The woman looked frightened; but Marcellin spoke some more reassuring words—she accordingly put on her cloak and prepared to accompany him.



As they issued together from the house, Marcellin said, "You will precede me at a short distance; and I shall maintain my eye upon you. If you attempt to escape, that moment will you be handed over to the custody of the police-officers. I shall keep my word with you in respect to securing your safety if you place full confidence in me."

La Dolina proceeded along the streets, Marcellin having already told her what her destination was; and in a quarter of an hour they reached the French Embassy. Edgar at once introduced the woman into the presence of the French Ambassador; and with this functionary they remained closeted for about half-an-hour. At the expiration of that time they went forth again: and when they were in the street, Marcellin said to her, "You have now many long hours before you to escape from Florence. I need not advise you to avail yourself of this licence:

you know how much depends upon it. Within forty-eight hours the terrific explosion must take place; and you cannot blame me if circumstances have compelled me to drag you thus into the matter. On the contrary, you ought to be thankful for your escape; and you may yet appreciate the advantage of having performed one good action in your life. But beware how you send the slightest intimation of what has occurred, to the Marchioness herself!—for I warn you that you will be watched, and your arrest would follow immediately upon any treacherous violation of the caution which I now give."

La Dolina muttered a few words of promise and of gratitude, and hurried away. She was not actually watched, because Marcellin knew full well that the warning would be sufficient. And so it indeed proved; for in less than an hour La Dolina's house was shut up, and Florence was rid of a wretch who for many long years had proved a

secret but not the less virulent pest to the society of the Tuscan capital.

Having thus far accomplished his measures, Edgar Marcellin enclosed in an envelope the key of the outer door belonging to the suite of apartments in which he had left the Marchioness. He addressed the packet to the housekeeper of the Mirano establishment; and despatched it to its destination by a porter, who was instructed to depart hurriedly immediately after leaving it. At the same time a couple of the French Ambassador's domestics, purposely disguised in mean apparel, were sent to keep watch upon that same mansion, with orders to lose no time in reporting whatsoever movements they might observe on the part of the Marchioness. Edgar then sent a note to the hotel at which Charles De Vere had put up; so that it might be delivered to him, in case by any possibility he should happen to return before measures were taken for his deliverance from whatsoever captivity he had been plunged into.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOUSE IN THE APENNINES.

WE must return to Charles De Vere, whom we left at the moment when he succeeded in effecting his escape from the fortress of Bagno. It will be remembered that he was clad in the uniform of the Governor of that castle; and he was mounted upon a steed to the excellence of which he could confidently trust for the outstripping of all pursuit. It was nine o'clock in the evening as he galloped like a whirlwind through the principal streets of Bagno; and a distance of forty miles lay between himself and the city of Florence, to which he was resolved to return forthwith in order to seek the protection and intervention of the British Ambassador.

He had a well-filled purse in his pocket, thanks to the noble generosity of Father Falconara; and the military uniform seemed favourable to his progress rather than otherwise—for he thought that if he happened to fall in with any of the *sbirri* who patrolled the mountain districts, he would assuredly be allowed to pass without even so much as a question being put. For the present, however, the night was as black as pitch; but he knew there was every chance of the stars and the moon presently peeping forth, inasmuch as a peculiar state of the atmosphere indicated that the clouds would clear away upon the face of heaven.

He rode on for upwards of half-an-hour at the utmost speed to which the animal could be urged; and this was great—for he was fleet and of high spirit. At length, when perfectly convinced that he had outstripped pursuit—at least for the present—Charles reined in his steed; and now, as he had foreseen, the moon was beginning to appear. He had no certitude that he had hitherto followed the right road—though on the other hand he had not much misgiving on the point; for it was a wide open route which he had pursued, and he knew that on starting from Bagno it was the correct one to bear him to the Tuscan capital. In a short time he reached a stone bridge over a

river; and inasmuch as at the foot of this bridge there was a little chapel where pious wayfarers might pay their adoration to the Madonna, Charles at once recollected it; and he was now no longer in doubt with regard to the accuracy of the route he was taking. It was therefore with a joyous exhilaration of the spirits that he pursued his way; and as the moon acquired greater power, and myriads of stars came forth from their super-nal mansions to bear her chaste company, our hero was enabled to survey the features of the district through which he was passing. The scenery was all wild and mountainous; but the road was broad and even; and as Charles listened ever and anon with suspended breath, he could hear no sounds indicative of pursuit coming from behind. Thus more and more cheered, he pursued his way, until he deemed it again expedient to draw in the bridle and afford the good steed a little breathing-time.

Our hero was now approaching a hamlet, which possessed a church with a spire of so curious a construction that it was impossible not to remember it if the eye had ever before happened to glance upon that object. And Charles did recollect it; so that he now acquired another proof that he was undeviatingly pursuing the road which led to Florence. He thought that it would be advisable to procure some refreshment for his steed without much farther delay; and he resolved to accomplish this purpose in the hamlet, provided he saw no *sbirri* or other auspicious persons lurking about. Accordingly, on entering the village, and observing that it seemed well-nigh deserted, our hero rode up to the wretched little inn which stood in the middle of the place, and which indeed was the only house in the hamlet where a light was to be seen through the windows: but it was now past ten o'clock, and therefore the rural dwellers in those districts were for the most part locked in the arms of slumber.

The moment the traveller stopped at the little tavern the landlord came out, accompanied by a glattently looking girl who seemed to be his daughter; and when they caught sight of the uniform which Charles wore, the man doffed his cap—the girl made a low curtesy and hastened back into the house, no doubt for the purpose of communicating the circumstance of an officer of rank having just halted at the door. Charles leapt down from the saddle; and the landlord, still cap in hand, said, "Will your Excellency walk in and take some refreshment?"

Our hero spoke but a monosyllable by way of affirmative, and pointed significantly to his horse.

But at that very moment the heavy tread of military boots and the jingling of spurs reached his ears: the sounds were evidently emanating from the interior of the tavern itself; and for a moment Charles stood utterly irresolute how to act. Another instant, and three *sbirri* appeared upon the threshold of the inn. Carrying their hands to their hats, they made the usual military salute—which our hero acknowledged with the well affected *nonchalance* of a superior officer. Then, drawing a piece of money from his pocket, he tossed it to the *sbirri*, making a motion with his hand to intimate that they might return into the house from which they had just issued. Again was there a military salute in acknowledgment of our hero's generosity: but he noticed that the

men were evidently eyeing him with attention and with a growing surprise in their looks—for they doubtless thought that he was very young to wear the uniform of a captain of the *shirri*, a rank which was almost equivalent to that of a colonel in the regular army. They however retired into the tavern; and Charles lost not a moment in leaping upon the back of his steed, snatching the bridle from the hand of the astonished landlord;—and away the youthful traveller galloped like lightning, leaving the host of the village inn transfixed to the spot with a species of stupefied dismay at this sudden departure.

The *shirri* rushed out just in time to catch a glimpse of the forms of our hero and his steed ere they were lost to view in a turning of the road.

"By all the saints!" ejaculated one of the officers, "there is something wrong in this! What did he say? why did he vanish so abruptly?"

"He said nothing," answered the landlord, to whom these rapid questions were addressed. "In fact he only spoke one word during the few minutes he was here; and that was just to say *gee* when I asked him if he would take any refreshment."

"And he did not wait for the refreshment!" ejaculated the *shirri* who had before spoken: "but he ran off like a felon! How old did you take him to be, master landlord? for you were nearest to him."

"Twenty or so, at the outside," was the response,— "quite a beardless youth—very handsome—"

"Twenty! and he to wear the uniform of a commandant! This must be looked to! Ah! and have we not heard how some strange freaks were played last night by a young gentleman and lady who were being taken prisoners to Bagno—how they escaped and were then recaptured—"

"Well, but I happen to know that they *did* reach Bagno after all," said another of the *shirri*: "for I met a friend of mine in the forenoon to-day, when I was riding down yonder by the stone bridge—this friend belongs to Bagno—"

"Spare us a long tale!" cried the first speaker. "We will get to horse and pursue the young fellow who has just left us! There is something wrong in the matter, I am confident! But if not, no harm will be done."

The three *shirri* hastened to get their horses out of the wretched shed which served as an apology for a stable; and they were just on the point of mounting them, when they heard the sounds of other steeds advancing at a furious gallop—and in a very few moments three horsemen dashed up to the front of the little inn. These new-comers belonged to the garrison of Bagno: they were in pursuit of our hero—and their tale was soon told. Much rejoiced were they, therefore, to learn that they were upon the right track: they left their own steeds at the hostelry, and mounted the three which the *shirri* had just gotten in readiness, but which they now willingly abandoned to the service of the soldiers from Bagno.

Meanwhile Charles De Vere was speeding onward at a rapid rate,—blaming himself for his folly in having halted in the hamlet, and deliberating whether it would not be better to turn into some bye-road, or else take measures to procure a

change of apparel with the least possible delay. But if he were to diverge from the main route and seek a bye-path, he might lose himself among the mountains; and as for tarrying anywhere on the highway itself to procure other vestments, this seemed to be out of the question after the incident which had just occurred.

"For suspicion must have been excited by my egregious folly," thought Charles; "and pursuit is now certain!"

He rode onward for about twenty minutes without drawing bridle: but now he came to a hill which was so fearfully steep that he was compelled to relax the pace of his horse. The descent was long as well as precipitous; and Charles had not proceeded half way down the decline, when the sounds of galloping steeds were wafted to his ears. They came from behind. Ah! now his worst fears were confirmed—he was evidently pursued! The moon was shining with a splendour that made all things visible: our hero looked back—and he discerned three horsemen on the summit of the eminence, about half a mile behind. He did not immediately urge on his own steed again; but he watched to ascertain whether the pursuers would descend the hill with caution, or whether they would rush wildly down it, reckless of danger. His uncertainty was soon cleared up: he perceived that they were adopting the latter course. They had discerned him—they were coming down the precipitous slope at a mad headlong pace! Charles patted his horse's neck; and in another instant he was careering down the hill as swiftly as those who were in pursuit. He reached the bottom in safety, and now threw a glance over his shoulder. Only two of the horsemen were in sight: he had not time to leave his glances lingering up the broad line of road in order to descry what had become of the third; but he concluded that the man's horse had failed or fallen in the ardour of the chase.

And now up the next hill dashed our hero: but the sounds of pursuit came nearer and nearer from behind—and it was only too evident that the horsemen were gaining upon him. He plied the whip with which Ursula had fortunately provided him ere he left Bagno; and the mettled steed appeared to comprehend that its rider's urgency was great—for it put forth all its powers. But by this time twenty miles of the journey had been accomplished, and the horse began to show signs of distress. Still Charles dared not spare the poor animal—for his pursuers were every moment gaining upon him. And no wonder! they had recently obtained fresh horses!

The summit of the hill was nearly attained; and our hero's keenly attentive ear made him aware that only one of the pursuers was close behind him—but he knew that in two or three minutes he must be inevitably overtaken. He ventured to glance behind: the other horseman was still half-way down the hill. A thought struck Charles! The death-struggle must come sooner or later: why not at this moment when he might stand a chance of beating his enemies in detail? Ah! but he had no weapon: for when Signora Belluno provided him with a suit of uniform, she had not thought it expedient, or else had forgotten to give him either sword or firearms. His only resource was in the riding-whip,

which was however but a poor weapon of offence for such a purpose as that which Charles De Vere was now rapidly revolving in his mind.

"Stop—or I fire!" exclaimed the man from behind: for he was now near enough to make his voice heard.

Charles at once reined in his steed—wheeled it round—and advanced towards his foremost pursuer, but without speaking a word.

"Ah, well, you surrender?" ejaculated the individual; "and that is the wisest course."

"Surrender? Never!" exclaimed Charles, now urging his steed close up to the horseman, who had at the moment halted; and the attack was instantaneous.

This attack was made by our hero, who seized the soldier with his right hand, and with his left made a snatch at one of the pistols in the man's holsters. But both horses swerved so abruptly and in such a manner that the assailant and the assailed fell to the ground. Charles had missed his clutch at the pistol: but he was however uppermost as he and his foe rolled in the road. A glance showed the intrepid youth that in less than a minute the second horseman would be upon the spot: in fact his danger was immense! The riding-whip had fallen from under his arm when he made the attack upon his enemy: it was now within his reach—in an instant he snatched it up—and he dealt the prostrate soldier a blow upon the forehead. The man was stunned. Charles sprang to his feet, and in the twinkling of an eye he was armed with the brace of pistols belonging to the holsters of the defeated foeman's saddle. Scarcely was this done when the next horseman was upon the spot—the report of a pistol rang through the air—and a bullet whistled within an inch of the young Eoglishman's ear. He felt that it was a matter of life or death for himself—at all events of liberty or captivity; and he hesitated not to fire in return. With a loud cry the man fell from his steed, which had reared high up at the very instant that the two shots thus rattled close upon one another; and Charles was in a moment upon his second enemy whom he had prostrated. The wretch was groaning with pain: his right arm was broken by the pistol bullet—and his horse had just trampled on one of his legs. Our hero felt deeply for the unfortunate being; but he dared not tarry any longer on the spot—for the remaining horseman was now descried galloping up the hill, and Charles knew not how the chances of a third conflict might tell against himself. Besides, every instant was precious; for the sounds of firing might bring other scouring parties of *sbirri* to the spot, if any should happen to be within hearing.

Having every reason to suppose from the circumstances of the recent chase, that the steed which the foremost horseman had ridden was fresher, if not naturally swifter, than his own—or rather than the one which he had borrowed from the Governor of Bagno—Charles mounted that which was best calculated to ensure his escape. Another moment and he was clattering away from the scene of the conflict. Ten minutes elapsed—no sounds of pursuit came from behind: he had either outstripped the third horseman—or else this individual had tarried upon the spot to minister to his injured comrades. But Charles

saw the absolute necessity of quitting the main road, no matter at what risk of temporarily losing himself amongst the Apennine mountains. The alarm would be carried along this road with a rapidity which he could only hope to outstrip by the aid of fresh horses; and he had discovered that the uniform which he had at first thought would prove advantageous, had helped, with other circumstances, to produce an opposite effect.

He soon reached a spot whence a couple of bye-roads branched off, one to the right and one to the left. With only a moment's deliberation he took the one to the right; and in about ten minutes he found himself at the entrance of a wood. The lane however ran through it; and for about half-an-hour Charles pursued his way in almost complete darkness. On emerging from the opposite extremity of the grove, our hero found himself on the brow of a hill commanding a view of a valley dotted with groves and irrigated with numerous streams. At about the distance of a mile Charles discerned the glittering vane of a village church, and a group of white buildings amongst the trees. A little nearer he could distinguish a large water-mill; and as he rode down into the valley, the din of the cascade which flowed from the mill-stream reached his ears. The path which he was pursuing led to the left; and in that direction he discerned no habitation whatsoever. In a few minutes he entered another little grove; and as he emerged from it, he suddenly came upon a large party of gipsies encamped by the side of a stream. No less than three fires were blazing; and close by one of them our hero at once descried four or five *sbirri* warming themselves. A glance swept around, showed Charles that their horses were grazing at a distance of some twenty or thirty yards. His first impulse was to dash onward with all possible swiftness: but a second thought convinced him of the impropriety of taking a step which would inevitably engender suspicion—whereas he might possibly pass without otherwise exciting it.

"An officer, by the saints!" ejaculated one of the *sbirri*.

"A commandant!" cried another: and then, this one, rushing forward, made the proper military salute, exclaiming, "Will not your Excellency stop here for a few minutes? There is a fire—and there are provisions!"

"No—I have not time," responded our hero, exerting himself to speak the words in Italian with the least possible accent indicative of the foreigner. "But here is something for yourself and your comrades——"

"Ah!" exclaimed the *sbirro*, who by this time had approached within a few yards of the spot where our hero had reined in his steed: and then like a tiger springing upon his prey, the official darted at Charles De Vere to tear him down from his horse.

This was one of the party who had pursued our hero from the village inn during the preceding night, and who had secured him after he had leapt forth from the chaise in which he had rejoined Ciprina—or rather, we should say, Floribel Lieter. The recognition was now mutual: the *sbirro* had detected Charles through the guise of the commandant's uniform—while on the other hand our hero had all in a moment recollected the

fellow's countenance when that ejaculation burst forth from his lips.

But as the *sbirro* flew at the young Englishman to tear him down from his steed, the intrepid Charles dealt his assailant a tremendous blow with the butt-end of a pistol: the fellow reeled back—and away sped our hero as if borne on the wings of a whirlwind.

"To horse!" shouted the official, the moment he recovered sufficiently from the blow to give the cry.

His companion *sbirri*, who had seen the encounter and the repulse which their comrade experienced, required nothing more to make them aware that something was wrong: they sprang towards their steeds, and in a few moments Charles was again the object of an exciting chase.

The horse which he bestrode tore along the ground: but the sounds of the pursuing animals were soon wafted to his ears. At a little distance ahead there was another wood; and our hero was resolved to make for it as the only means of escaping from the enemy. The beaten path did not lead to the wood: it descended farther into the vale. Charles leapt a wide brook, and galloped across a level ground towards the wood. Just as he entered it, he looked back, and saw his pursuers were urging their own animals across the stream. He rode forward into the wood for about five minutes—then struck off abruptly to the right—and then after a short interval as abruptly to the right again; so that he emerged from the wood on the very same side by which he had entered it, though at a point much lower down. He could see nothing of his pursuers; he hoped that he had baffled them, and that they had either ridden straight through the wood, or else were still beating about in its mazes. Retracing his way across the level ground, he again made his horse lesp the stream; and once more within the beaten road, he pursued his course in the direction of the water-mill and of the village to which we are now alluded. In about a quarter of a hour he left the water-mill behind him on the left hand; and he was looking around to ascertain whether there were any indications of pursuit, when his eyes settled upon a lonely habitation, but which had a most picturesque appearance. It was a white house built very much in the style of one of those beautiful little villas in the Vale of Arno; and vines were festooning over its portico. It stood in the midst of a garden protected only by a low fence; and the grounds were tastefully laid out. Our hero could discern the immense bunches of purple grapes which appeared amongst the leaves that had as yet scarcely caught autumn's embrowning tint, although it was the commencement of the month of November of which we are writing. A light was shining through the casements of a room on the ground floor; and over those long windows reaching to the ground, the crimson curtains were drawn. Even through these curtains Charles could distinguish the reflection of a cheerful fire playing upon them; and it was with something like a sigh of envy that he thought of the happiness that might possibly be enjoyed by the inmates there, seated at a comfortable hearth, in a warm room, and with a good supper upon the table.

Charles reined in his steed as he contemplated

that picturesque little villa, and suffered his imagination to depict a scene of comfort within the room whence the roseate light streamed forth. Ah! if he dared call there and ask for refreshment for himself and his steed, as well as for a change of apparel to enable him to pursue his way without molestation on the part of the *sbirri* who patrolled those mountainous districts! But no!—how could he possibly tell who might live there? He was just on the point of moving away from the spot, when one of the crimson draperies was put aside—the casement opened—and a lady came forth. It however struck Charles at the instant that her only object was to breathe the fresh air or enjoy the beauty of the night; for she stopped short on beholding a horseman in uniform standing close by the fence and gazing so intently upon the habitation. The moonbeams fell fully upon her; and Charles at once discerned that the light evening dress that she wore contrasted with the duskiness of her complexion. He was likewise struck by the admirable symmetry of this lady's figure. She was tall—her neck was long and arching—and the head was well poised upon it. Masses of coal-black hair rolled in heavy tresses upon the finely cloping shoulders and the superb bust. And then too, a magnificent pair of eyes flung their bright glances upon our hero;—and thus within the space of a very few moments he became aware that he was in the presence of a dark-complexioned young lady of a most ravishing beauty.

She had stopped short, we have said, on beholding a horseman posted close by the fence, and whom she naturally at the first glance took to be an officer of justice. But her hesitation speedily vanished; and advancing towards our hero, she asked in a voice the richness of which seemed full of a golden harmony, "Did you wish to make any inquiry at this house, signor?"

She spoke in Italian—but with the accent and manner of one who evidently understood the language indifferently, though the voice itself was so surpassingly melodious.

"If I mistake not," replied Charles, answering her in the same language, "you are not Italian, signora?"

"No," she responded, a smile parting her beautiful red lips and revealing the two rows of ivory teeth. "Neither methinks are you—although you ought to be:" and the large black eyes swept their glances over the military uniform which our hero wore. "Are you French?"

"No. I am English:"—and now Charles spoke in his own native tongue; for he had become impressed with the conviction that the lady must belong to one of the West India islands.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, now also speaking in English: "you are a Briton and clad in that apparel?"

"For God's sake assist me!" said Charles: "it is a disguise! I have escaped from a fortress—the police are looking for me—but I swear to you that I have done no harm!"

The quadron—for such she evidently was by the dusky tint of her complexion—fixed her large dark eyes upon our hero for a few moments as he sprang down from his saddle: she seemed to be fathoming the purposes of his soul, to ascertain whether he had spoken truly and that he was no dishonourable character:—and then, as her hand.

some countenance became all in a moment illuminated with confidence, she cried, "Oh, yes! I believe you!—it is impossible that such as you could be criminal!"

"Thanks, lady, whoever you are!—a thousand thanks for those generous words!" and Charles spoke with a gushing enthusiasm; for he was indeed in the position of one to whom an act of friendship had become of most vital importance.

"Hasten!" said the quadroon,—"hasten to bring your horse hither!"—and she was tripping towards a gate at the extremity of the fence, when Charles, suddenly inspired with a chivalrous thought, ejaculated, "Ah! but if I should compromise you?—if this place should be searched? Perhaps you may be living alone——"

"Now I know that you are an honourable young man!" exclaimed the quadroon,—"even if I had before the slightest doubt upon the subject! You are generous—and generosity is goodness! No—I do not live alone. I am married—my husband is here——"

"And you are taking all this responsibility upon yourself?" cried Charles.

"Oh, yes!" rejoined the handsome creature; and it struck our hero for a moment that a smile of pity or contempt passed over her moist red lips. "Come! come! or you will perhaps be pursued and captured! As for searching this house, let anybody dare attempt it—and never trust me if we do not give our enemies a warm reception! But here are the stables."

Charles De Vere had flung a look of gratitude upon the quadroon for the assurance she had given him that she took upon herself the responsibility of the present proceeding—thereby meaning, as he supposed, that she would answer for the concurrence of her husband: and now it was a look of wonder and admiration which he threw upon her, as she seemed to display the courage of a heroine and talk of resisting an assailing foe. The stables were reached; and Charles found three beautiful horses in the stalls, one of which was evidently meant for the use of the lady herself. With the utmost readiness she had taken a lantern from the shelf and lighted it,—but at the same time summoning a domestic by the unmistakable English name of John.

"The groom has retired to rest some while," said the lady to our hero; "for it is eleven o'clock," she added, glancing at a beautiful little watch attached to a superb gold chain that feebled over her bosom.

"Yes, ma'am! Coming, ma'am!" exclaimed a somewhat gruff voice from a loft which was reached by a ladder from the harness-room adjoining the stable. "Is anything the matter, ma'am? Them alarms again—or them freaks and disturbances——"

"Hush, John!" cried the quadroon somewhat eternally; "and make haste to come down and put up the horse of a gentleman—an English gentleman—a friend of our's—who has just arrived."

In a very few moments the groom made his appearance, half dressed, and at first with a very sleepy look: but he quickly opened his eyes as wide as ever in his life they were opened, on beholding an individual in the uniform of a police-officer.

"Ah, ma'am! so they've come at last—have

they?" exclaimed the groom in a woe-begone voice. "I always thought it would end in this! I knowed it! That last night's business——"

"Silence, sirrah! silence!" interrupted the quadroon in a peremptory manner, and her brilliant black eyes darted forth shafts of angry lightning: but instantaneously regaining her self-possession, she said mildly, and even with kindness, "You are foolish, John, to give way to these idle fears and speak thus unguardedly: you might lead persons to entertain singular ideas concerning us—as if we really stood in terror of the police-authorities!"

Charles De Vere could not help thinking there was something very strange in the remarks made by the man and the observations which they had now elicited on the part of the quadroon herself: but when he again flung a look upon her countenance, he could not for another instant suppose there was anything wrong with regard to her. As for the groom, we should observe that he was an elderly man, short and thick-set, and with a comical expression of countenance, which however denoted good-nature of disposition as well as simplicity of mind.

"Do not ask any questions, John," resumed the dusky complexioned lady; "but see that you follow my commands to the very letter. Carry this military saddle up into your own room. Yes—and the bridle likewise. Let no one penetrate thither, at your peril! Cover up this horse with the cloths: and if any one should by chance enter the stable, tell him to the ground if he should stretch forth a hand to lift the cloths and examine the horse! In conclusion, keep a still tongue in your head."

The groom—who had been dividing his looks between his mistress and our hero, gazing with profound respect upon the former and with no small degree of curiosity on the latter—signified by a low bow and a few words that the instructions he had just received should be faithfully adhered to.

"Follow me, sir," said the quadroon, now turning to De Vere. "It would be as well for you not to show yourself in front of the house."

Thus speaking, she opened a door leading out of the harness-room, and conducted our hero into a back-yard—and thence into the house itself. She led the way into that very room on the ground-floor where he had seen the light burning, and from one of the casements of which his beautiful hostess had first emerged. She now hastily proceeded to close that casement; and approaching Charles, she said, "If you wish to have an immediate change of apparel, you shall be provided with it: but if you mean soon to retire to rest, it will perhaps be needless."

"It is needless for to-night," responded Charles. "But, Oh, Madam! how can I express my gratitude——"

"Enough!" interrupted the quadroon, laying her finger upon her lip: "I have as yet done nothing for you: I see that you require the advantage of friendly offices—and these you shall assuredly receive at my—I mean at our hands. Wait! you are hungry! The servants have retired to rest—but I will see what the larder can do for you."

Charles was again about to express his fear that

he was giving a great deal of trouble: but the quadroon lady paused not to listen, and hastened from the apartment. Our hero warmed himself by the cheerful fire; and he mentally ejaculated, "How singular, that scarcely five minutes have elapsed since I longed to find myself in this comfortable room—and here I am! But who is this lady? Why do I not see her husband?—why did she make no apology for my not finding him here when she conducted me into this room?—and what meant those singular observations on the part of the groom in the stables? Ah! and how is it that she is so ready to play the heroine and defend the house against any attack that may be made upon it? Good heavens! can it be possible that she really has any fear of a visit from the police?"

Charles then remembered how she had come forth from the room when he had stopped at the fence; and he went on to ask himself, "Was it not to breathe the fresh air, nor to gaze upon the beauty of the heavens? but was it because she had peeped forth, and desecrating the uniform of the law's officers, was alarmed—and then mustering up all her courage, she came forward to address me? Can it be possible she has a guilty conscience?"

Charles De Vere knew that many parts of the Apennines were infested with banditti, and that it was no uncommon thing for families seemingly respectable to be in league with those wretches for the more effective plundering of unwary or confiding travellers. Had he fallen into such a snare? For an instant he dreaded lest there might be something only too truthful in the idea; but the next instant he dismissed it from his mind,—at the same time feeling his countenance become crimson with shame as he mentally cried, "The bare suspicion is a flagrant insult and diabolical outrage towards one who has treated me with the most hospitable kindness!"

The door now opened, and the quadroon reappeared. She bore a large tray, piled up with such a quantity and variety of provisions as to prove that the larder was indeed most copiously as well as luxuriously furnished. De Vere sprang forward to receive the tray from her hands: but she said, with a most amiable smile, "Oh, it is not too heavy! I can assure you I am neither very weak nor very fastidious. Pray be seated! I have supped—or I would keep you company. Ah! you shall have wine!"

Again she glided from the room; and in a few minutes returned, carrying a basket filled with bottles, each containing a different sort of wine. Charles was astonished and bewildered by this profusion: he was again confounding himself with mingled apologies and thanks—but the quadroon begged him to be seated and to do justice to the repast which (as she expressed herself) she was only too happy to be enabled to place before him. Then she began drawing cork after cork, notwithstanding that Charles assured her he never indulged copiously in wine, and that at all events one species would be sufficient for him. But she exclaimed, as if in the most ingenuous manner in the world, "Oh, we are accustomed to draw quantities of corks beneath this roof!"

"Ah, then, you see a great deal of company?" said our hero.

"We never see any one," replied the quadroon: "and therefore, apart from the pleasure that I have in rendering a service to an English gentleman, your visit is a perfect godsend. But Ah! you have no fruit!—and we have a delicious fruitage close at hand!"

The handsome quadroon glided across the apartment, opened the casement again, and passed forth into the front garden.

"They drink quantities of wine beneath this roof," said Charles to himself; "and yet they see no company! Here too is a supper which seems to be the remnant of a dinner prepared for a dozen people. It is unaccountable!"

Again did the mystery and bewilderment of his thoughts produce an unpleasant effect on his mind: but again did he succeed in repelling the suspicion which had lifted its reptile-head in his heart. The quadroon reappeared, closing the casement behind her, and carrying two enormous bunches of the most splendid grapes in some leaves which served as it were for a basket in the united hollows of her two exquisitely-shaped hands.

"Oh, madam!" exclaimed Charles, "I really must once more entreat you to pardon me for all the trouble——"

"Trouble?" ejaculated the quadroon: "I do again beseech that you will not mention it! And now, if you will excuse me for a little while, I will just see that there is a chamber properly arranged for your reception. I have already called up a maid-servant for the purpose."

"Oh, I can repose myself anywhere!" ejaculated our hero; "I can stretch myself upon a sofa——"

"And what is the necessity of putting yourself to any inconvenience," asked the quadroon, with a smile, "when you put me to none? I have half-a-dozen bed-chambers at my disposal, and therefore can assuredly spare you one."

With these words the quadroon again tripped forth from the apartment, leaving our hero with the exquisite cold collation, the half-dozen different kinds of delicious wines, and the luscious fruitage from the vine that festooned over the portico.

"This is the most admirable and generous hospitality!" thought Charles: and then he found himself mentally adding, "provided there be no sinister aim or ulterior intent!"—but literally stamping his foot with anger, and feeling his cheeks glow with shame, he cried, "Let me put away these suspicions which are even more degrading to myself than dishonouring for her!"

The quadroon returned to the apartment: and she said with a most amiable courtesy, "Your chamber is prepared. Not that I wish to hurry you——"

"I am ready, madam," responded our hero: "for I now feel overwhelmed with fatigue."

"Come then," she said, taking up a wax-light and she escorted him from the apartment.

We should have observed that the room was elegantly furnished. Charles was led through a hall most tastefully fitted up; and the staircase which he now ascended had a richly sculptured balustrade, and was handsomely carpeted. The landing showed some eight or ten doors communicating with different apartments: and the house thus proved to be much larger when seen inside than it appeared when viewed externally. One of those

doors stood open; and at the threshold the quadroom stopped short. Proffering her hand to our hero, she said, "I again bid you welcome to this house. And now good night."

He pressed that hand with grateful warmth—took the wax-candle—and passed into the chamber which was provided for him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHARLES AND THE QUADROOM.

CHARLES closed the door, and found himself in a small but elegantly furnished room, the window of which looked upon the garden at the back of the house—a fact which he ascertained on peeping forth from behind the curtain, not with any sentiment of impertinent curiosity, but simply to assure himself that the premises were not watched by any suspicious-looking individuals. A side door opened into a neatly appointed little dressing-room; and on a chest of drawers Charles beheld certain articles which he could not help thinking must be intended for his own use. Clean linen, a complete suit of clothes, a hat—in short, everything befitting the wardrobe of a young gentleman, was to be found there. No doubt existed in the youth's mind that the quadroom's kind consideration had already extended to the morrow; and with much emotion he murmured to himself, "Ah! my dear mother—and you, likewise, my beloved Agnes!—Oh! how rejoiced should I be to afford you some day an opportunity of thanking this generous-hearted lady here for her noble conduct towards me!"

As our hero surveyed the garments one after another, he saw that they were of English make, and the name of an English manufacturer was likewise at the bottom of the hat. Charles was enabled to assure himself at a glance that the clothes would fit him; and he tried on the hat, which exactly suited the size of his head.

"These, then, must belong to this beautiful lady's husband," thought Charles to himself. "Doubtless I shall see him to-morrow? Perhaps he had already retired to rest?—or perhaps he may be absent? However, I long to make his acquaintance; for it is impossible that he can be otherwise than hospitable and generous as his wife:—or else she would not dare do so much as she has done for me."

Issuing from the dressing-room, Charles De Vere proceeded to examine his bed-chamber with more attention than he had at first bestowed upon it. There were two pictures in the room, which struck him at a distance to be lithographic prints—but which he perceived on a closer inspection to be crayon drawings. Both were evidently likenesses of the quadroom; and they both represented her with a tolerable degree of fidelity—though it was impossible to enhance on paper or on canvase, on ivory or on steel—with brush, with pencil, or with engraving needle—the charms which were naturally her own. One drawing was a bust-likeness—the other was a full length one. Of the former nothing more need here be said; but relative to the latter a few details may be added. The quadroom was represented in her own native West

Indian clime,—which was evidenced by the foliage wherewith she was surrounded. She had on a large sun-hat: she was loosely clad in a light drapery—a species of *deshabillée*, or morning-wrapper, fastened at the throat by a neat pink ribbon, and gathered in at the waist by a species of shawl-kerchief tied loosely around her form. The luxuriant masses of her coal-black hair floated over her shoulders; and she carried a large basket full of the fruits of the tropics. There was an ease and grace about the entire figure which not merely showed that the picture had been drawn by a skilful hand, but likewise that the mingled litheness, voluptuousness, and elegance of the quadroom's form had been fully appreciated by the artist. Indeed, Charles had not gazed upon it many moments ere he thought to himself, "That must be exactly as she looked in her own native clime!"

The two pictures, though representing the same person, yet afforded a strong contrast. The first-mentioned one—namely, the bust—evidently depicted the quadroom in a European costume, just as she might have appeared as the star of a ball-room; while the other picture represented her in all the abandonment, so to speak, of a delicious freedom in her own native tropical clime. The former showed her trammelled as it were with formalities, as her very person seemed constrained and shackled by the jewels that embellished it; while the latter depicted her in the enjoyment of all the unrestrained ease of a West Indian life. In the former picture the beautiful quadroom appeared to be the Child of Fashion: in the latter she seemed to be the Child of Nature.

Charles De Vere contemplated these two pictures for several minutes, revolving those contrasts in his mind,—wondering who the beautiful quadroom could be, and whether her husband was also a West Indian, or an Englishman—and how it happened that they were settled in this secluded valley of the Apennines? And then the singular observations made by John the groom recurred to our hero's mind: but he strove with all his power to repel the suspicion that *would* persist in every now and then thrusting up its head like a reptile from its coils. And in order to divert his thoughts into another channel, Charles began to lay aside his military uniform and to prepare for seeking his couch. He was in the midst of this occupation when all of a sudden he heard a door open and then close with violence. This door was on the same landing with our hero's own chamber; and with such force was it closed again, that the whole house shook. Our hero was naturally startled: he wondered what on earth it could mean; and then, as all continued silent, he conceived that it must be the result of some accident. He was therefore continuing the process of disapparel himself, when the door on the landing was again burst open—and this time he heard a man's voice giving utterance to some fearful and vindictive imprecation—though who was the object of this wrath, did not appear from anything that Charles could glean or gather. The door again closed violently; and then a key was heard to turn quickly in the lock. Charles was both astonished and pained; for he began to think that this must be the lady's husband; and he said to himself, "Is it possible that I can be the cause of any mis-



CARLOTTA BELLUNO.

understanding between them? Is he vexed and angry, after all, that his wife should have shown me so much generous hospitality? Ah! it would afflict me much if the poor lady were subjected to any brutality on my account!"

Charles sat down in the chamber, pursuing his
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painful thoughts for upwards of ten minutes, and during this period desisting from the process of disapparelling himself. At length, finding the house was again quiet, he made haste to retire to bed. Slumber soon began to steal over his eyes—for he was thoroughly wearied and exhausted, be-

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cause, as the reader will recollect, the whole of the preceding night had been a sleepless one for him. He had just reached that point where the last train of intelligible thought is slipping out of the mind, and the ideas are falling into dreamy confusion previous to being steeped in oblivion—or, in plainer terms, he was just sinking into a profound slumber, when the rapid clattering of a horse's hoofs startled him up to complete wakefulness, and he caught the din of a steed galloping away from the house. He sprang out of bed; and tearing aside the curtain, looked through the window. At that moment he caught sight of the quadroom, dressed in light flowing drapery, and with a large sun-hat upon her head, just as she appeared in one of the pictures suspended to the wall—with the exception that she carried nothing in her hands. It was close by the angle of an outhouse that he beheld her: she was gazing up at his window—the moonbeams tell full upon her countenance—he could even behold them reflected in the luminous depths of her eyes—he could distinguish how vividly they set forth the ivory whiteness of her teeth between the rich vermilion of her lips. And yet it was for barely half a dozen seconds that she thus remained in sight: she looked as if she were gazing round the corner of that outholding up at Charles De Vere, and that when she was fully assured he looked at her she beat a retreat.

He dropped the curtain, and retired to his couch—not immediately to re-enter it, but to reflect anew upon what had just taken place. What meant the trappings of that steed? who was departing from the house? was it villany to be perpetrated elsewhere upon others—or treachery to be consummated towards himself?—was the quadroom in the garden to keep a watch upon his (our hero's) chamber? or was her conduct tantamount to some overtture which only awaited the response from himself?

Bewildered what to think—full of misgivings, yet scarcely liking to acknowledge them unto himself, much less to give a more serious expression to them by any such proceeding as issuing from his chamber and demanding explanations,—Charles sat thinking what surmises to arrive at and what course to adopt. But all was again silent; and the influences of those mysterious incidents began to subside from his mind—so that he said to himself, “After all, I am unmolested—I have received every proof of the most delicate attention, even to the extent of preparing my wardrobe for to-morrow! All this hospitality has been afforded me without so much as my very name being demanded. Now, it is all either most gloriously magnanimous or most hideously treacherous! If the former, I have no right to take the slightest notice of whatsoever is passing within these walls. But, if on the other hand, it be the latter, vainly may I hope to struggle against it!”

Charles still reflected for a few moments; and then he ejaculated, “Let us hope that it is all the former—the most magnanimous hospitality!”

Then yielding to the naturally generous impulses of his heart, he stifled all other considerations—banished all misgivings—crushed all suspicions beneath the iron heel, so to speak, of his own strong will; and returning into bed, did his best to compose himself to sleep. In this he pro-

seutly succeeded; and in less than half-an-hour slumber once more stole upon his eyes.

How long he had slept he could not tell, when he was awakened by the renewed violent clattering of a horse's feet:—he started up in such a sudden fright that the perspiration burst out in large drops upon his brow, and he could hear his heart palpitating as if it were with a series of concussions of some tremendous internal pump. A steed was evidently being galloped furiously and madly towards the house; and the sounds terminated with that species of crash which is caused by the abrupt pulling-up of a horse by a reckless rider. Then all was still again. Some moments elapsed—we might almost say minutes—before Charles De Vere could so far compose his ideas as to give way to deliberate reflection; for the most courageous individual in existence will necessarily experience this species of panic terror when so suddenly startled up from the depths of a profound slumber.

“Now, after all,” said Charles to himself, “what has all this got to do with me? If there were any intention to deliver me up into the hands of justice, the proceeding would not be conducted with a din and a clatter only too well calculated to fill me with alarm and cause me to escape from the house. No! it is something which I cannot understand, and into which I have no business to penetrate,—a guest as I am beneath a hospitable roof! Let me compose myself to slumber again!”

De Vere wiped the perspiration from his brow, and his head was once more reclined upon the pillow. But this time sleep did not so readily revisit his eyes; for notwithstanding all his good resolutions, and the charitable constructions which he sought to put upon passing incidents, he could not help reflecting on them in all their details, while the mysterious language which had fallen from the lips of John the groom in the stables seemed to form a most suspicious association with those incidents. Yet after a while weariness and exhaustion again invoked the presence of slumber; and his senses were again steeped in oblivion.

Again too was he ignorant of how long he might have slept,—ignorant likewise was he of what the exact circumstance was which caused his awakening—whether a sound falling upon his ear or a hand being laid upon him; but certain it is that he once more started up in sudden fright. The wax taper had gone out; but the moon was shining brightly—and he had left the curtain partially drawn back after he had looked from the window at the time when he had seen the quadroom lady in the garden. Thus the beams of the planet of the night penetrated into his chamber; and now he beheld a figure standing by the side of his couch. An ejaculation burst from his lips: it was the word “Treachery!” which was thus suddenly vociferated; and he made a spring towards that form. The figure glided away—it disappeared from his view—and he heard the door of the chamber close, but not with violence.

He was out of bed—he was rushing towards the door, when he stopped short, asking himself if it were all a dream or if it were a reality? He placed his hand upon his brow, and reflected in the most painful bewilderment. He strove to recollect what semblance the figure wore: but he

could not revive the impression that was at the moment made upon his mind, if any were left there at all. Vague and indistinct was his notion of that form—something clothed in white, with long dark hair! No more conception indeed had he now of it than if there were such things as ghosts and he had veritably seen one. He was almost inclined to fancy that he had been the sport of a vision alike horrible and fantastic,—when the conviction suddenly burst upon his mind that he had assuredly heard the door close.

"Now," he said to himself, "I can endure this no longer! I have studied my best—but it is impossible to tolerate these horrors!"

Hastening into the dressing-room, he slipped on some clothing, and stole forth from his chamber with the determination of at least descending the stairs and ascertaining whether all was still in the lower part of the house. He was now on the landing; a glimmering light stole through the window—but very feebly; for there was a curtain to that window; and De Vere was compelled almost to grope his way towards the staircase. Stealthily gliding footstep, as if they were naked feet upon the stair-carpet, met his ear: he stopped short—the boards creaked beneath his feet—and the next instant a pair of warm arms were thrown around him—he was pressed to a glowing bosom—and a soft and melodious voice said in a low earnestly entreating tone, "For God's sake come with me!"

It was the voice of the quadroon. An ejaculation burst from our hero's lips as he suddenly withdrew himself from that embrace; and then she said, "Hush! hush! for heaven's sake! It is an error—a mistake!"

"But what does all this mean?" asked Charles, in a determined tone. "Some one has been to my room—"

"Oh, sir, I beg you to return thither quickly!" responded the lady, who was almost completely unseen in the obscurity. "No harm is intended to yourself! My God! I am distressed! But pray do not judge hastily! I swear to you that I mean nothing wrong!—neither does he—that unfortunate being! Retire, I implore you! I will tell you everything to-morrow!"

There was an expression of the deepest sincerity in the quadroon's voice; and De Vere was convinced that she spoke the sentiments of her soul.

"Pardon me, madam!" he said, "pardon me!—and forget that I have quitted my chamber!"

The next moment he was in his room; but this time he took the precaution to lock the door—and now again he retired to his couch. That the lady must have alluded to her husband—or else to some other person of whose presence in the house Charles was previously ignorant—he had now no doubt. He deeply regretted having issued from his room; but at the same time he felt that under all circumstances his conduct readily admitted of excuse. Everything was to be explained on the morrow, according to her promise; and with this idea he contented himself. Indeed, after a little while he felt more contented and tranquillized, so far as he himself was concerned, than he had as yet done since he was an inmate of that chamber. Sleep revisited him—and he slumbered on uninterrupted till the morning.

When he awoke his watch told him it was nine

o'clock. He looked forth from the windows of his chamber and dressing-room: the sun was shining brightly—and its beams were reflected in the streams which irrigated the valley. He proceeded to perform his toilet; and he found, as he had anticipated, that the garments which had been left for his use in the dressing-room fitted him as exactly as if they had been originally made for him.

He now descended from his chamber, and sought the apartment where he had supped on the preceding evening. The table was spread with all the requisites for a most substantial breakfast; and he had not been there many moments, when the door opened and the quadroon lady made her appearance. A vivid blush rose to her cheeks, crimsoning through the transparent duskiness of her complexion; and her looks wore for a moment modestly hung downward as she greeted our hero kindly. He likewise felt embarrassed—and from the same cause,—both recollecting that embrace which had occurred in the darkness of the staircase.

"I fear, sir," said the quadroon, now suddenly looking up with the frankness of one who had really intended no harm in that proceeding,—“I fear, sir, that you passed a night of alarms. I should have warned you beforehand, only I thought and hoped that certain medicines which I had procured for my unhappy husband, would have produced a sedative effect.”

"Ah, madam!" ejaculated our hero, "I perceive by your words that you deserve all my sympathy; and I beseech you not to breathe another syllable of explanation on so painful a topic!"

The quadroon took De Vere's hand and pressed it for a moment with a friendly warmth; while two tears, trickling from her handsome eyes, traced their pearly pathways down her dusky cheeks, and dropped on that hand which she thus clasped.

"Yes, sir," she resumed, in a tremulous voice, "I promised explanations—you have a right to demand them—and they shall be given. I have already alluded to my unfortunate husband. The truth is that Mr. Barrington—"

"Barrington?" echoed Charles, struck by the name; and then as certain recollections flashed in unto his mind, he exclaimed, "Good heavens! is it possible? You are Mrs. Barrington?"

"Yes," answered the quadroon, in astonishment. "Do you know the name? But, Ah, perhaps for a certain reason it is familiar to you—"

"Yes—I know the name!" interrupted our hero. "Oh, how singular is all this! And your husband—is not his Christian name Gustavus?"

"The same," rejoined the quadroon. "But you, sir—"

"My names are Charles De Vere," said our hero.

"De Vere? Oh! were you not a witness at that memorable trial—"

"Yes—the trial of Winifred Barrington, the cousin of your husband Gustavus. Ah, the singular combination of circumstances which should have led me to encounter you!"

"Singular indeed!" ejaculated the quadroon; "and, Oh! I am rejoiced that it has been in my power to show the slightest attention or to render the least service to one who has always been re-

presented to me as having behaved so nobly and forbearingly when giving his evidence on that memorable trial where the life of my husband's cousin was at stake! But how came you, Mr. De Vere, to know so many particulars?"

"Has not the name of a young lady in England ever been mentioned in your hearing! I mean, Miss Evelyn."

"Yes!" exclaimed the quadroom. "I have heard, through my husband, how Miss Evelyn behaved so kindly to Winifred—"

"And to that Miss Evelyn is my heart devoted," rejoined Charles; "and in her letters to me she has frequently spoken of Winifred—and she has told me how Winifred's cousin, Gustavus, had married a young West Indian lady."

"And, Oh! is not this extraordinary," cried the quadroom, "that you should fall in with me in the midst of this Apennine seclusion? I feel as if we were old acquaintances, Mr. De Vere!"

"And I shall never forget," returned our hero enthusiastically, "the generous hospitality which I have experienced beneath your roof. Perhaps you know that I belong to the British Embassy at Naples? But no—you were not aware of it—"

"Yes—on the contrary," interjected Emily, "I now remember to have heard so. But how, in the name of heaven, came you to be involved in such frightful dilemmas?"

"A few words of explanation will suffice," responded our hero, "to prove to you that I am innocent—"

"Oh! that I knew from the outset!" exclaimed the quadroom. "Did I not tell you so last night at the gate? Yes!" she added, while a blush flitted over her handsome countenance; "your looks were sufficient to prove that you were incapable of a misdeed—"

"And your good opinion of me is not unwarranted," rejoined Charles. "Certain affairs—of which the world will doubtless soon hear more—compelled me to visit Florence. Scarcely had I arrived there, when I was seized upon—it was by error—I was mistaken for another—and hurried off to captivity at Bagno. Thence I escaped in the uniform of the Governor. The tale is now too long to tell you—"

"You shall tell it me presently," exclaimed the quadroom,—"at least if you think fit."

"Oh, yes! after all your kindness I can have no secrets from you! But your husband, madam—excuse me for again alluding to him—but may I hope to have the pleasure of seeing him?"

"Yes—assuredly," rejoined Emily: "you will see him presently. He will not rise to breakfast. Oh! he will be astonished when he hears that a friend—for so indeed under all circumstances I must call you—"

"Pray let me be considered as such!" interjected Charles. "And now pardon my selfishness—but have you any reason to believe that my presence here is suspected by the police of this district?"

"Not the slightest reason! I have spoken to the servants—the groom is fidelity personified—and you need fear nothing. I presume that your plans are already settled?"

"To return to Florence without delay," an-

swered our hero. "Do not start, madam! I trust that I shall now incur no danger there: it will only be while journeying thither, and before I can seek the protection of the British Embassy at that capital, that my safety may be imperilled."

"Well," said the quadroom, "we must presently devise some scheme to ensure you a safe journey to Florence. Perhaps you are not in a hurry for an hour or two?"

"I would much rather adopt cautious and prudent measures," responded Charles, "than wilfully court peril by rashness or precipitation. Besides, I feel so comfortable beneath your hospitable roof, that it would be most uncourteous and churlish on my part to express a desire to hasten away."

"Now let us breakfast," said Emily, acknowledging with an amiable smile and a graceful bow the courteous compliment which had just fallen from our hero's lips.

"You will pardon me," said Charles, when they were seated at table, "for remarking that the two portraits in the chamber where I slept last night, bear a striking resemblance—"

"Do you think so?" asked Emily, with a smile and a blush.

"It is impossible to think otherwise," returned De Vere. "It was an artist of no ordinary skill—"

"Oh, pray cease your compliments, Mr. De Vere!" exclaimed the quadroom; "or you will retain the colour incessantly upon my cheeks!"

"Am I to understand," asked Charles, with some degree of surprise, "that it was your own pencil which delineated those likenesses of yourself?"

"My own pencil," rejoined the quadroom. "Ah! perhaps you think me very vain and conceited for choosing such subjects: but one day the humour took me—I wished to depict a contrast—Indeed, Mr. De Vere," she added after a brief pause, and in a more serious tone, "I wanted to analyze my own feelings, and ask myself whether I was happier as Emily Pincock in my own native Jamaica, with my straw hat, my loose dress, and my basket of fruit—or as Mrs. Barrington, bedecked with gems and jewels in Europe, and studying all the Parisian fashions."

This was too delicate a subject for Charles De Vere to venture an observation upon, inasmuch as it seemed to involve the point whether the quadroom were happier in a single or in a wedded state; and he could not help thinking that it was a topic which ought not to have been broached to him at all. Emily seemed to fathom what was passing in his mind; for she at once said, "I should not allude to this point, Mr. De Vere, did it not help me on towards the explanations which I owe you on account of last night. Nay, do not interrupt me!—for my own sake I must insist upon giving them."

The quadroom spoke so earnestly and entreatingly that our hero felt himself bound, as it were, to listen to her; and moreover, in her position of his hostess, she evidently had a right to rule and direct the conversation. Charles therefore held his peace; and Emily continued in the following manner:—

"Suffer me to assure you at the very outset, Mr. De Vere, that I love my husband. Yes!—I

love him devotedly! and I would lay down my life for him! You, perceive, however, that I am not altogether happy: you see that there is something—perhaps indeed you have already guessed it? For, Oh! you must have heard those noises last night—In short, Mr. De Vere, it is with a deep sense of humiliation I admit to you that the unfortunate Gustavus has acquired an inveterate taste—you understand me—and it is drink that maddens him!”

Charles had not been very far from conjecturing the truth: indeed he had already suspected that this would prove the solution of the mystery. He therefore started not with surprise; but his countenance wore an expression of sympathy on behalf of the young lady who was thus revealing her grievances unto him.

“Yes,” she continued, “drink maddens him! So wild and strange is his humour that I am compelled to pet and pamper him as if he were a spoilt child. His appetite at times so completely fails him that he can only be tempted by the variety as well as the delicacy of his repasts. Hence that profusion which you may perhaps have already noticed;—and it has now become a habit with me to maintain this profusion on every occasion. I saw that you were startled and bewildered last night when the groom made certain allusions. The truth is, Mr. De Vere, that Gustavus plays such wild pranks, the faithful John is always trembling lest the attention of the authorities should be directed to the house, and that an order should even be issued from the mayor of the neighbouring village to consign my unfortunate husband to an asylum or a prison. I have hawever more than once declared that if those barbarians of Italian *shirri* dare venture to make their appearance at this house, I will convert it into a castle and defend the entrance unto the very last! Gustavus shall not be snatched from me!”—and the quadroom’s magnificent eyes flashed fire as she thus spoke.

“In the name of heaven, Mrs. Barrington,” exclaimed Charles, “take care how you embroil yourself with the authorities!—for remember that the laws on the Continent are very different from those under which you have dwelt either in England or in the colonies; and tyrannous acts are perpetrated with facility and readiness in these climes, which could not even be dreamt of in the atmosphere where the British banner waves.”

“Rest assured, Mr. De Vere,” replied the quadroom, “I would not willingly court a quarrel with the authorities: I am only too much afraid that the proceedings of Gustavus will sooner or later involve us in difficulties. Alas! as you may have seen—or at least have suspected—he is at times quite mad, and also of a violence that no coaxing nor persuasion can subdue. His proceedings of last night must have afforded you some idea of all that I have to put up with, and the consequences of which I have to apprehend. He rises in the middle of the night, vowing that he is haunted by a spectre—and he will mount his horse and gallop away from the frightful presence of the goblin! Twice last night did he thus spring from his couch and rush to the door of the chamber: but on both occasions I succeeded in holding him back——”

“I twice heard the door of a chamber on the

same landing open and shut forcibly,” said Charles.

“And Ah!” ejaculated the quadroom, “you know not how vexed and annoyed I was on your account. Good heavens! I wondered what you must think? I was half inclined to steal forth from my chamber when Gustavus slept again—knock at your door—and beg you not to take heed of any disturbances which might occur: but—but—in short, I hoped that you were sleeping soundly.”

“Alas, madam,” said Charles, “all you tell me is very dreadful—and I deeply sympathize with you! But so long as Mr. Barrington shall be permitted to indulge in his fatal predilection——”

“Ah! how am I to break him of it?” ejaculated the quadroom. “But I have not yet told you all,” she hastened to say. “I had fallen into a deep slumber last night, when on awakening I missed my husband from my side. I glided down stairs,—having tarried only a moment to throw on a morning wrapper and a straw-hat which I wear in the garden; and I sped to the stable. It was as I dreaded: Gustavus, haunted by his imaginary spectre—only half dressed—with wild looks—was hastily saddling and bridling his steed; and then away he went as if borne on the wing of the whirlwind! His mania is always to gallop through the neighbouring village; for he believes that the instant he passes the churchyard the spectre leaves him. But good heavens! what must the people of that village think?—and how is it indeed that they have remained quiet so long? I ought to have observed, Mr. De Vere,” continued the quadroom, “that when Gustavus is in these insane moods, all my influence over him is annihilated—and the groom shrinks in terror from the fierce looks which his master bends upon him. Oh! it is dreadful to see such a young man—a mere youth—in such a state! But let me hasten to bring these explanations to a conclusion. I waited anxiously for my husband’s return last night——”

“But what fearful vigils for you to keep, madam!” exclaimed Charles, naturally feeling indignant at the conduct of young Barrington.

“Oh, I do not complain on my account!” replied Emily; “but I fear for my husband—I fear for all the consequences that may ensue—and I experience the deepest mortification and humiliation when meeting any of the dwellers in this valley. Oh! last night you may conceive what I felt on your account: and when with emotions which I cannot describe, I peeped round the angle of the building to see whether the light was still burning in your chamber, and whether you were moving about—whether, in short, you had been alarmed by the furious trampling of the horse’s hoofs——”

“Yes—I saw you, Mrs. Barrington,” interjected De Vere. “But I beseech you to quit this painful topic—unless indeed you would permit me to offer my advice——”

“Well, we shall see,” ejaculated the quadroom, in a somewhat evasive manner. “But let me say a few words more in reference to the incidents of the past night. Gustavus returned from his mad ride: he seemed to be thoroughly exhausted—and as his head touched the pillow sleep fell upon his

eyes. I likewise was exhausted, and I sank into slumber again. Again I woke up to miss him from my side! It was *then* that he must have found his way to your room. Subsequently," ended the quadroon, thus bringing her narrative to an abrupt conclusion, "I found the unfortunate being seated at the table down stairs where you had supped: he had lighted a lamp, and he was pouring bumpers of wine down his throat."

De Vere comprehended full well why the quadroon hurried so abruptly over that portion of her narrative: it was when seeking her husband on the occasion to which she had just referred, that she had encountered Charles in the darkness of the staircase, and fancying him to be Gustavus, had thrown her arms around him.

"You will scarcely require to be told, Mr. De Vere," said Emily, "that Gustavus was in a state utterly unfit to be informed of your arrival last night; and thus I was compelled to take upon myself that whole task of hospitality which he ought to have shared with me. Having passed a long evening in the heated atmosphere of this apartment, while Gustavus sat imbibing the juice of the grape until he could drink no longer, I went forth to breathe the fresh air. You may imagine, therefore, how surprised I was on beholding a police-official—as I took you to be—posted in front of the house. But I think you will give me credit for having accosted you with a certain degree of presence of mind; and therefore you must not conceive it to be any idle vaunt on my part when I repeat that if the Tuscan *abirri* dared attempt to enter this house, I would resist them unto the very last."

"Let us hope," said Charles, "that my presence will not bring so much ill-fortune to your habitation; and that as for Mr. Barrington——"

"It is useless to express a hope on this point!" interjected the quadroon quickly. "Gustavus is inveterate in his habit! Indeed I believe he would die if by any chance he were compelled to abandon it suddenly!"

"Might I inquire how long you have been a resident in this Apennine valley?" said Charles.

"Only a month or five weeks," responded the quadroon. "We were travelling from Florence to Ravenna with the intention of embarking for Venice: we halted in this valley—the house where we now dwell, was to let—Gustavus, by some extraordinary freak, took an immediate fancy to the spot—and I can assure you, Mr. De Vere, that I was only too glad to be enabled to settle myself with him in this seclusion. You see that he is mad! There are times when he is completely deranged—when I even dread his violence——"

"Mrs. Barrington," said Charles gravely, "it is impossible such a state of things can be permitted to continue. You have already honoured me by expressing a sentiment of friendship: let me then speak to you as a friend—the friend of your husband and yourself!"

"Oh, if you mean to advise me to have recourse to harsh and severe measures," ejaculated the quadroon,—"if you mean that I should place him under restraint——No! no! I will do nothing of the kind! But, Ah!" exclaimed Emily, thus suddenly interrupting herself, and at the same time starting up from her seat, "hide yourself! Quick! quick! The police!"

Charles glanced towards the window, and he beheld a couple of *abirri* in the act of alighting from a chaise which had stopped at a little distance from the house. The quadroon sprang towards a door which opened into an adjoining apartment; and hastily beckoning for our hero to enter thither, she said with rapid utterance, "Fear nothing!—trust to my wit to deceive them! There is more than one door, as you perceive, in this room; and if they insist on searching the house, you shall glide from one apartment into another, so that they shall not set eyes upon you at all. Lock that further door—and be sure to open it only when you hear three gentle taps given on the panel!"

Emily Barrington hastily withdrew into the room which she had just compelled Charles De Vere to quit: she locked the door of communication between the two apartments, and secured the key about her person. Scarcely had she done this, when she beheld three persons—two in uniform and one in plain clothes—approaching the front door of the house.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE VILLAGE MAGISTRATE.

WITHOUT giving these persons time to ring the bell of the front door, the quadroon quickly opened one of the casements, and stepped forth with an air as if she had only at that very moment set eyes upon them.

"What is your business, signora?" she inquired.

The individual in plain clothes stepped forward, and with a very courteous bow, said, "I am the Mayor of the village. I believe I have the honour of addressing myself to the Signora Barrington, wife of the English gentleman who upwards of a month past hired this habitation?"

The quadroon inclined her head in signification of an affirmative.

"I have a mission to execute," proceeded the Mayor: "it is a delicate one, and in some sense painful—though I hope that the results will be most beneficial, and lead to the consolidation of your happiness, signora, and that of your husband."

The quadroon was at first at a loss to conceive why the Mayor should assume so marvellously civil a demeanour, and even wear an aspect of hesitation and diffidence, if he came to search the premises for Charles De Vere: but as he went on speaking, Emily began to comprehend that the object of this official visit would most probably turn out to be different from that which she had at first expected. We may as well at once observe in this place that Charles De Vere could catch every word that was spoken in the front garden, as well as in the adjacent room to which Mrs. Barrington invited the Mayor and the two *abirri* to follow her. We may likewise add that the Mayor was a retired miller who had made a little fortune at the water-mill in the neighbourhood: he was polite in his manners—he did not possess a bad heart—but he was resolute and firm in the execution of his duties of his office.

The quadroom requested the Mayor to be seated: but she suffered the *sbirri* to remain standing near the casement by which these visitors had entered.

"And now, signor," she said to the Mayor, "perhaps you will have the kindness to explain to me more fully the object of your presence here?"

The Mayor bowed,—and proceeded to say, "I am sure, signora, at the outset, that you will give me credit for the best and most conscientious motives. I should be the last to invade the domestic peace of a family, or to interfere in those matters which ought to be settled between husband and wife——"

"I am afraid, signor," said Emily, "that this preface heralds something terrible—or at least very painful? At the same time I thank you for the delicate way in which you are evidently disposed to perform your duty, whatever it may be."

The Mayor again bowed—and went on to observe, "I need scarcely say, signora, that all persons seeking an asylum in a foreign country, have a right to the protection of the laws of that country. But on the other hand, they themselves are bound to adhere to those laws——"

"Would you have me understand, signor," inquired the quadroom, with a most amiable smile, "that we have violated the laws of your country?"

The Mayor took a pinch of snuff; and then, with a short cough, he said in a firmer tone than he had hitherto adopted, and with a more business-like manner, "Yes, signora—the laws of Tuscany have been violated—certainly not by yourself—but by some one residing beneath this roof. You know that I allude to your husband Signor Barrington?"

"The laws violated by him?" ejaculated Emily, with an air of surprise, though at the same time, she bent a look of most deferential humility upon the village magistrate. "I do not know how, signor. Our passports are in due order—we contract no debts—we pay with punctuality——"

"True, true, signora!" interjected the Mayor: "but perhaps it would be better if I came to the point at once. The truth is, then, your husband has become a source of alarm, if not of terror, to the whole neighbourhood——"

"Indeed, signor?" exclaimed the quadroom. "Have you seen him misconducting himself?—have these officers seen him——"

"In good sooth, signora," interjected the Mayor, "I have scarcely ever seen your husband at all: for he, it appears, is seldom out in the daytime—and I, thank heaven! am seldom out at night."

"And we scarcely know the gentleman," remarked one of the *sbirri*, "beyond this much,—that he is slender and well made—quite young—with hair either dark brown or else black——"

"Well, well," interrupted the magistrate, flinging a glance of stern rebuke upon the garrulous *sbirro*; "we do not want you to run through the details of the personal description in his passport. Speak when you are spoken to. Signora," he continued, turning again towards the quadroom, "the habits of your husband are singular: but with their singularity we should have nothing to do, were it not that Signor Barrington's conduct becomes an intolerable nuisance to the entire neighbourhood. He raises the most fearful alarms by night—gal-

loping his horse madly—his throat sending forth the wildest and most startling cries—he himself being only half-dressed——"

"And pray, signor," asked the quadroom, "how often have these adventures happened during the four or five weeks that we have been resident in this house? Not a dozen times——"

"Blessed saints, signora!" cried the magistrate: "and is not this number enough? If the first month of Signor Barrington's residence in this neighbourhood must be taken as a specimen of his usual habits, there will be——let me see?—twelve times twelve——Well, there will be a hundred and forty-four nights in every year that the whole village is to be startled by the freaks and ravings of a madman!"

"Depend upon it, signor," responded the quadroom, "my husband's unfortunate temperament will grow calmer. In fact, I have already consulted your village doctor—I have administered medicine to my husband—unknown to him—in his food——"

"But last night," interrupted the magistrate, "the nuisance was greater than ever. Your husband rode through the gardens of some dozen poor villagers, trampling down everything——"

"We will pay for the damage, signor," said Emily, taking out her purse.

"This is an after-question," replied the Mayor: "and indeed, the villagers will be glad enough to waive every other consideration, if they can only get rid of your husband, and so put an end to so intolerable a nuisance."

"Well, signor," said the quadroom, "I promise you that I will remove with my husband into another neighbourhood as soon as I can."

"That will not do, signora," said the magistrate: "matters have come to that pass at which it is absolutely necessary the law should be put in force—though in the most humane and merciful manner. I will not keep you any longer in suspense; for I have come with the fixed determination of sending Signor Barrington, your husband, under an escort to the care of the British Ambassador in Florence, to be dealt with as may be deemed most expedient by his Excellency."

An idea struck the quadroom; and she felt that it imparted such a sudden joyous expression to her countenance she was compelled to turn aside and raise her kerchief to her face, for fear that she should betray herself.

"Poor creature!" muttered the magistrate; "I foresaw it would give her great pain:—but what am I to do? the law is paramount above everything!"—and now, having by this stuporous reflection brought back his feelings from compassionate sympathy into official self-complicity, he took another pinch of snuff.

"No, signor," ejaculated the quadroom, suddenly starting up from her seat: "you would not do this!—it would be infamous and abominable. Do you know the effect it would have? It would be consigning my unfortunate husband to a lunatic-asylum!"

The Mayor bowed, from the force of a habit which had become a sort of instinct with him: and then looking hard at Emily, he said, "And upon my word, signora, the very best thing that could be done with your husband—only I did not exactly like to suggest it just now."

The quadroon flung a look of indignation upon him for a moment; and then suddenly altering the expression of her countenance, she said, "Oh, signor! have mercy! have mercy!"

"My dear young lady," answered the Mayor, whose naturally humane heart was again moved towards that superbly handsome quadroon, "I beseech you to tranquillise yourself. I am a father—I have sons and daughters—and I would not willingly inflict pain upon anybody. I am now only doing my duty; and if I performed it not, I myself should be called to an account. I beseech you, therefore, not to harbour ill-will towards me! On the contrary, tell me, dear young lady, how I can execute this most unpleasant duty in the way least annoying to yourself; and you have only to express your wishes to find them fulfilled."

"Oh, signor!" said the quadroon, drawing her kerchief across her magnificent eyes, "you are really good and generous—and I am not ungrateful! Oh, no! believe me, I am not ungrateful! But my poor husband—if he be informed beforehand—"

"Why need he be informed?" asked the Mayor. "I had the misfortune to conduct a relative of mine to a madhouse some six or eight months ago—I pretended that I was going to take him on a visit of pleasure—he was delighted—"

"Ah, I comprehend!" ejaculated the quadroon. "A thousand, thousand thanks for this kind suggestion! Oh, you have lifted a burden from my heart! But, Ah! there is yet something which afflicts me!"

"Name, name it, my dear young lady!" said the magistrate. "You see that I am fertile in expedients; and these officers are really excellent fellows—good-hearted—and merciful in the exercise of their duties. They will show every indulgence."

"The truth is, signor," murmured Emily, in a broken voice, "I never, never could travel with my poor dear husband to Florence—knowing that his ultimate destination must be a lunatic-asylum—"

"By the saints, signora! this is easily managed!" responded the magistrate. "Can you contrive to entice your husband into that vehicle? I myself will conduct him to Florence; and he need not see that these officers take their station behind the chaise."

Emily appeared to reflect for a few moments; and then she said, as if with the sudden eagerness of one who clutched at the best alternative which was suggested, "Yes, I can do so!"

"Very good," said the magistrate. "Then why cannot you follow in the course of the day? I suppose you mean to proceed to Florence, to watch over your husband's interests?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!" cried Emily. "Let it be thus arranged!"—then grasping the magistrate's hand, she pressed it with the utmost fervour.

"There, there, my poor young lady! You see we are managing this unpleasant business in the best manner possible! Now, is there anything else which we can do for your comfort or satisfaction?"

Emily again reflected for a few moments; and then she said, "I will tell you frankly, signor. The sight of a police-official in his uniform drives

my poor husband perfectly wild. He has all the spirit of an Englishman—he cannot bear to be interfered with! So long as he finds in you—which of course he must do—an agreeable travelling-companion—"

Here the Mayor bowed complacently.

"He will be as quiet and as tractable," continued the quadroon,—"aye, and as lucid and as intelligent as you could possibly wish. But only just let a *sbirro* approach him—or even let him so much as catch a glimpse of a police-uniform while journeying along the road—and I will not answer for the consequences!"

"Well, signora," said the magistrate, "all this is very easily managed. He shall not see these *sbirri*—we will travel with the silken blinds of the chaise drawn down—"

"Oh, signor, if you will do all this," ejaculated Emily, with a look of the most fervid gratitude, "everything will be well!"

"If I may rely upon you to conduct the matter as we have suggested, so far as your part is concerned," rejoined the magistrate, "you may rely upon me. I will begin by giving you a proof!"—then turning towards the *sbirri*, he said, "Go and conceal yourselves behind that clump of trees; and let the chaise draw close up to the door."

The police-officials disappeared through the casement; and the magistrate, then addressing the quadroon very seriously, went on to say, "I do not wish to insult you, signora: heaven forbid! But permit me to remark that if with the mistaken love of a wife, you seek to effect your husband's escape—"

"Signor!" interrupted the quadroon, drawing up her fine tall form in the most dignified manner. "I am incapable of repaying so much goodness on your part with so black a treachery! In three minutes my husband shall stand in your presence. Yea—three minutes are sufficient for me to prepare him to expect that he is going on a pleasure-joint, with a friend who has conceived a kind interest in us both. He is fortunately in one of his mild, ductile humours—he will believe anything I tell him—"

"Not another word, signora!" interrupted the magistrate. "I have the fullest faith in everything you tell me. Go, and take your time in telling whatsoever tale with which you may deem it expedient thus innocently to beguile your unfortunate husband."

Emily Barrington flung another look of gratitude upon the Mayor, and issued from the room by the door communicating with the passage, and not by the one which led into the apartment where Charles De Vere was now most anxiously awaiting her presence. Yes—most anxiously; for he had overheard every syllable of this colloquy between the quadroon and the Mayor, and he had failed not to comprehend the project which his dusky-complexioned friend had conceived on his behalf. In a few moments he heard the three gentle taps given at the door; and the next instant Emily was in his presence. She placed her finger upon her rich red lip: her eyes were luminous with an expression of arch triumph.

"I have heard all!" hastily whispered Charles.

"Have I rightly understood—"

"Yes," she responded in the same low hurried tone as that in which he had spoken. "You see



ANOTHER PORTRAIT OF CICELY (THE HON. MRS. HARDRES).

that I have taken every precaution! You will proceed to Florence without the slightest fear of molestation!"

"Oh, thanks! a thousand thanks!" ejaculated our hero, clasping the quadroon's hands with effusion. "But one word! You must not remain here with your unfortunate husband——"

"No, no!—we will depart when night comes!" replied Emily. "Fear not for us."

"I beseech you to come with him to Florence," urged Charles. "Oh! it would give me the utmost pleasure to repay, if possible, the kindness which I am receiving at your hands. Rest assured that I will endeavour to make some impression upon Gustavus!—he shall be to me as a brother—I will reason with him—I will break him of his vile habits!"

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"Such a generous offer is not to be refused," answered the quadroon. "We will certainly come to Florence."

Charles named the hotel at which he had taken up his quarters in that city: and Emily reiterated with thanks her pledge to join him there, in company with her husband.

"Now, come," she said; "and remember the part which you have to play before this magistrate. Ah! and do not forget," she added, with a sudden blush rising to her cheeks, and with downcast eyes, "that I am your wife for the present—and—and—you must part from me as if separating from a wife!"

"In bestowing such an embrace upon you," replied Charles, "it will be as if I were taking leave of a sister!"

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They then issued from the room together, and proceeded by the passage to the apartment where the magistrate had remained. This functionary rose from his seat, and made a polite bow to our hero, — at the same time thinking to himself, "Well, really this is an exceedingly handsome young man! He neither looks like a drunkard nor a lunatic! But the greater is the misfortune; for he is all the more dangerous on that account!"

"So I understand, signor," said our hero, "that you have somehow or another formed my wife's acquaintance — and you are going to be kind enough to take me to Florence — and she is to follow — and you will be our guide in that beautiful city?"

"It will afford me the greatest pleasure to act in this capacity, Signor Barrington," responded the magistrate. "I think we need not delay. I happen to have a postchaise waiting."

"This is very strange!" ejaculated Charles, now assuming as vacant a look as he could possibly impart to his naturally intelligent countenance; "but I had made up my mind to go to Florence — I hate this dull neighbourhood!"

"Well, signor," said the magistrate, "we will set off at once. It is just noon — we have pretty nearly twenty-four miles before us — it will take a good three hours — and your excellent wife has promised to pack up all your things with the least possible delay, so that she may follow in the course of the afternoon. Are you ready?"

"Oh, I am ready," rejoined our hero, with a still better semblance of a vacant air. "Ready this moment."

The quadroom had stepped aside as if to conceal her tears; but she now dashed her kerchief across her eyes, and turned towards Charles with a smiling face. He threw his arms round her neck: the magistrate, with a delicate discretion, averted his looks, so as not to embarrass the farewells of the "husband and wife," as he took them to be; and our hero whispered in the quadroom's ear, "Believe me, my dear friend, your kindness never, never shall be forgotten!"

He then quitted her, and followed the magistrate through the casement which opened upon the front garden.

They entered the chaise together; and the postilion, who had already received his instructions, drove rapidly out of the enclosure. The equipage passed the knot of trees where the *shirri* were concealed, and there these two officials jumped up behind.

"There is certainly a little vacancy in his looks, after all," thought the magistrate to himself, as he sat by our hero's side in the chaise: — then turning towards Charles, he said, "The sun is very powerful, signor, considering the season of the year."

"Very," replied the young Englishman; "and I do not like it."

"Oh, well," exclaimed the magistrate, "nothing can be more easy than to remedy this little matter! Here! we will pull down the blinds."

Charles made no answer; and the village magistrate drew down the silk blinds accordingly. Everything was thus progressing in the most favourable manner in behalf of our hero — indeed to such an extent that he could scarcely believe in the reality of the circumstances which had thus transpired in his favour. The Mayor proceeded to chat upon

an infinite variety of subjects; De Vere responded in a gay strain; and every now and then he adroitly threw in some compliment to the village functionary — who kept on muttering to himself, "Ah! it is a great pity that this young man should be given to drinking! It is nothing but that which has turned his brain; and with a few weeks' sobriety in some comfortable asylum, he will be as lucid and clear-headed as I am myself."

The equipage pursued its way: and at the expiration of about an hour it halted to change horses. The Mayor was however careful not to allow the blinds to be raised; and the reader may be well assured that Charles did not express any desire to interfere with his companion's proceedings. On went the vehicle again — another hour passed — and there was a second halt.

"I do not think," said the magistrate, "that it is necessary to alight; for we shall very soon be in Florence."

"I confess that I am rather thirsty," responded Charles, thinking it prudent to sustain his character as the drunkard Gustavus Barrington; "and I should like a glass of wine. But never mind, since you say we shall soon be in Florence! Then we will have an early dinner or a late lunch; and all the best wines of the hotel shall be placed on the table."

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed the magistrate: "that will be much better than halting now any longer than is absolutely necessary."

The equipage once more pursued its way: and the nearer it drew to Florence, the more quickly beat our hero's heart. At length it rolled into the Tuscan capital: it proceeded through the streets — and it turned into the court-yard of the British Ambassador's mansion just as the clocks were chiming half-past three in the afternoon.

The magistrate drew up the blinds: a lacquey came forward and opened the door; and the Mayor jumped out first, saying, "Come along, my dear friend! — come along!"

Charles descended: the *shirri* were keeping themselves out of sight. The magistrate hastily whispered in the ear of the lacquey, "Conduct us without delay into the presence of his Excellency your master, who I hope is disengaged."

The domestic — perceiving that there was something unusual in the affair, and therefore deeming it to be one of importance — hastened to comply with the request that was made. He conducted Charles and the magistrate into the private cabinet of the Ambassador, simply announcing that they had just arrived, and that their business was urgent.

"May it please your Excellency," said the village Mayor, advancing with divers low bows towards the great diplomatic functionary, "permit me to present a fellow-countryman of your's — a certain Signor Barrington —"

"Ah!" ejaculated Charles; "what name was that which you were pleased to bestow upon me?"

"Barrington, foresooth!" answered the Mayor; and then looking at the Ambassador, he made a compassionate sign, as much as to indicate that the young man was not right in his intellects.

"You never were more mistaken in your life," said our hero, "than you are in respect to my name. Unfortunately I have no card to present to his Excellency: but his Excellency can testify

to you, that I am an attaché to the British Embassy at Naples when I state my name to be Charles De Vere."

"This is most true," said the Ambassador: "there cannot be the slightest doubt of it. But what has happened to you, Mr. De Vere?—for just now I had the proprietor of the hotel where you took up your quarters, calling in the greatest tribulation—not knowing what had become of you."

"All this is indeed a history which I have presently for your Excellency's ears," answered Charles. "In the meantime let us get rid of this worthy man—who certainly has played a very kind part, and to whom I lie under an immensity of obligation."

The village Mayor was now given to understand that it was really a Mr. De Vere, and not a Mr. Barrington, whom he had brought to Florence. He was at first exceedingly angry; he vowed that he had been grossly duped—that he would apply to the Ministers, and even to the Grand Duke himself, if necessary, in order to obtain justice: but the British Ambassador very soon gave him to understand that his threats were of little avail—while Charles, taking him aside, significantly whispered that if he stirred any farther in the business he would only become the laughing-stock of everybody and cover himself with ridicule. This was the most cogent argument that could be adduced to tranquillize the Mayor, inasmuch as it appealed direct to his pride and vanity; and he wound up the scene by imploring that our hero would place the seal of silence upon his lips, and forbear from making a joke of the matter. Charles promised everything calculated to appease the crestfallen Mayor; and this functionary took his departure, utterly bewildered as to the motives which could have led to the extraordinary cheat of which he had been rendered the victim.

CHAPTER XX.

CARLOTTA.

WE have alluded to the Signora Carlotta Belluno; but we have not, as it were, formally introduced our readers to this young lady. We have said that she was a nice-looking girl, about sixteen years of age, and possessing a figure which had all the justness of proportion without the voluptuous fullness of her mother's shape. She had light hair, which was of an exceedingly silky texture, and very luxuriant. She had blue eyes, and delicate features; the expression of her countenance was agreeable, without being particularly intelligent: she seemed a good-natured creature, inexperienced, simple, and confiding. She stood in the greatest awe of her parents—but most especially of her father, who was a veritable domestic tyrant. Indeed, Captain Belluno had a very mediocre opinion of the integrity of womankind; while his wife, Signora Belluno—perhaps judging by herself—thought that the less license that was given to her daughter the better. The consequence was that between the two, the poor girl was almost as much a prisoner as any other captive in the fort-

ress of Bagno; and even when she did pass beyond the gates, it was only under the strict guardianship of her parents. As for going out alone, it was an absolute impossibility. Thus poor Carlotta Belluno did not lead the blithest existence in the world.

Although Bagno was a small place, there were several genteel families living there and in the immediate neighbourhood; and as the Italians are very fond of company, it happened that evening parties, balls, and *conversazioni* prevailed at Bagno as well as anywhere else. A couple of English families were settled there; and though their object was to economize, yet they in their poverty were actually rich, in comparison with the generality of their neighbours—and they gave frequent entertainments. Captain Belluno was very fond of cards and good suppers; and therefore he seldom missed being at the gay assemblies which were given in the town. His wife frequently accompanied him—his daughter always; for these were the only occasions on which poor Carlotta enjoyed the slightest shadow of liberty, and could for an hour or two hold herself emancipated from that species of passive coercion which was exercised over her.

We have explained how Charles De Vere was consigned to the particular compartment of the fortress-prison to which he was allotted: we have shown likewise how he escaped; but we have not as yet seen how Ciprina endured her own captivity, or what treatment she experienced. The reader has already learnt that Ciprina and Floribel Lister were one and the same person: but perhaps we had better—at least for the present—continue to call her by that name which for some time past she had chosen to assume.

When separated from Charles De Vere in the vestibule of the castle, Ciprina was conducted through one of the three doors opening from that vestibule—thence along a passage into a courtyard surrounded by buildings. Here she was consigned to the charge of a matron—an elderly female, with a weather-beaten countenance, a form that looked as if it would have served for a grenadier, and a voice as rough and as hoarse as if she had been bawling for three or four hours from the top of the castle in order thereby to carry on a conversation with her friends in the town. In this compartment of the fortress, as well as in that to which Charles De Vere had been consigned, there was an array of doors communicating with an equal number of cells; and those doors were duly numbered. Ciprina was Number Thirty by name; and it was into a corresponding cell that she was now conducted. The matron pursued towards Ciprina just the same course which Roderigo the turkoy had adopted towards De Vere: namely, insisting that she should give up whatsoever valuables, money, or papers she might have about her person. Ciprina was likewise informed that she would be allowed to take exercise in the yard at such times as no other prisoner should be there; and inasmuch as there were only two female captives besides herself in the compartment, she saw that she should not be very much restricted in this respect. Lastly the matron observed to her that there was an excellent chaplain who would visit her if she thought fit; and Ciprina replied that

she should be most happy to see the holy father occasionally. She had learnt from Charles, previous to their separation in the lobby, that he was a friend of Father Falconara's; and she therefore encouraged the idea of being visited by the chaplain, who she fancied might become the intermediary of communication between herself and our hero, in case measures for an escape could be devised, or in case Charles might have any hopeful tidings to convey to her.

Ciprina had not been long in her cell, when the door opened and Carlotta Belluno made her appearance. It was the habit of the Governor's wife or daughter to visit the female prisoners at least once every day; for Captain Belluno had a strict idea of discipline, and he thought that the ladies of his household had their duties to perform as well as himself. Carlotta had heard that a most beautiful young lady had just been brought as a captive to the castle; and she was most anxious to see her. Ciprina took good care to render herself as agreeable as possible to the Governor's daughter; but Carlotta did not stay with her very long on the occasion;—for she had to seek her own chamber and prepare a dress for a party that was to be given in the evening by one of the English families resident at Bagno. Brief however though the interview was between the two young ladies, Carlotta was inspired with a most favourable opinion of Ciprina; and she thought to herself, "This is the first female prisoner that I ever took the slightest liking to; and really she is a very nice young lady!"

Later in the day Father Falconara paid Ciprina a visit; but it was only for a few minutes, and for the purpose of bringing her three or four religious books, with an intimation that when she had perused them he had others in his library that were very much at her service. She went out to walk in the yard; and perceiving a door standing open on the side facing the array of cells, she ventured to look into the building with which it communicated. It was the chapel of the fortress. Some old woman was cleaning it out; and Ciprina entered the sacred edifice. At first she advanced with hesitation, for fear lest she should be intruding; but the old woman told her that she was welcome to walk in and look about, for the simple reason that no other prisoner was there at the time. Most curiously arranged was the interior of that chapel,—every individual seat being so partitioned that no one prisoner could behold the rest—yet all could obtain a view of the altar and the pulpit. We need not dwell any farther on this description, then for the mere purpose of observing that the model is adopted in some of the chapels of the British prisons and penitentiaries where the "separate system" is observed.

Returning into the yard, Ciprina walked to and fro in no very felicitous state of mind; for she was terribly uneasy in reference to Edgar Marcellin, and terribly vindictive against the Marchioness of Mirano. There was a time, be it remembered, when she would have strained every nerve and gone almost any length to screen the Marchioness and induce Edgar to be merciful towards her; but now all this lenient feeling was banished from her heart. She only thought of the base treachery which had been played her; and she yearned for revenge. She wondered how

Charles was succeeding with Father Falconara, and how long their captivity was likely to last. Was it possible that all hope had died upon the threshold? Oh, no! she could not bring her mind to the contemplation of anything so horrible!

Ciprina was walking to and fro, when the grenadier-looking matron suddenly made her appearance, and said, "You must put down your veil, Number Thirty; for persons are about to enter the yard."

Ciprina at once drew down the thick veil that was attached to her bonnet; almost immediately afterwards a large pair of folding-doors opened at the extremity of the yard—and two men entered, carrying an enormous basket along to a pole which rested upon the right shoulder of each. It was a basket of the most solid and substantial wicker-work—about five feet long, three broad, and nearly four feet in depth. A green baize covered the top; and the osier-work was so close together that it was impossible to catch a glimpse of the contents of this immense basket; but the appearance of the two men carrying it, all covered with flour as they were, afforded an immediate clue to the solution of what would otherwise have been a mystery. This was the mode in which the bread, contracted for with a baker in Bagno, was brought thrice a day into the fortress.

The folding-doors were closed; and the two bearers of the huge basket passed on to the other extremity of the yard. There a door opened into one of the store-rooms; and the two bakers, depositing their pennier close by that door, hastily proceeded to empty it of its contents,—each one taking up as many loaves as he could carry and bearing them into the store-room, where he arranged them on the shelves; and thus the two men kept passing in and out of the store until they had emptied their basket. Then they sat down to rest themselves, and have a chat with the turnkey who was inside the store taking a note of the quantity of loaves delivered; and after a little while the two bakers slung the pole over their shoulders again, and passed out of the fortress at a much lighter pace than that by which they had entered it.

Ciprina witnessed this operation—a proceeding at which she would not have flung a second glance if outside those walls; but in a state of captivity everything, however trivial, seems to be fraught with novelty and amusement. After having walked for about a couple of hours in the court-yard, Ciprina re-entered her cell, the grim-looking matron being in readiness to lock the door upon her. At about eight o'clock in the evening, she sought her pallet; and so completely exhausted was she after the fatigues and sleeplessness of the preceding night, that she almost immediately sank into the arms of slumber—nor was she awakened by the din and confusion which shortly afterwards prevailed in the fortress on account of the escape of Charles De Vere.

Meanwhile Carlotta Belluno was with her father at the party; and she was enjoying herself all the more especially because there was some one present whom she very much liked to see, but towards whom she was compelled to observe the most guarded demeanour every time she perceived the cold stern eyes of her father wandering towards her. At length all of a sudden there was a

violent ringing at the gate of the house: some one wanted to speak immediately with the Governor. Captain Belluno hastened forth to the gate; and to his dismay learnt that a prisoner had disappeared. As a matter of course he decided upon returning instantaneously to the castle; and it was equally as a matter of course that he took Carlotta with him—but not before she had found time to exchange a few very interesting observations with a certain gentleman who was present. Indeed this little colloquy took place while her father, having bidden her prepare to depart, rushed out again to question the emissary at the gate. Now, with the rest of the incidents of that evening the reader has already been rendered well acquainted: but we will nevertheless pause for a moment to observe, ere continuing our narrative, that when Carlotta found herself alone in her chamber, she sat down to reflect upon all that had passed betwixt herself and that certain gentleman with whom she had exchanged such very interesting observations. Yes—there Carlotta sat in her chamber—one hand supporting her countenance, the other listlessly playing with her fan; and thus for perhaps half-an-hour she remained absorbed in thought, ere she began to disapparel herself for the purpose of retiring to rest.

That night passed; and as we have seen, Charles De Vere succeeded in making good his escape—and he became the guest of the quadroom in the beautiful secluded Apennine valley. And throughout that night of such memorable adventures Ciprina slept without once awakening; so that when she opened her eyes in the morning she was utterly unsuspecting of anything unusual having occurred during the past twelve hours. At length the matron entered; and she exclaimed in a voice which seemed hoarser than ever, "Well, this is a pretty business! and to think that he should have done such a thing!"

"What do you mean?" inquired Ciprina, starting up in her pallet, but instantaneously suspecting that she was about to receive some intelligence with reference to De Vere.

"Ah! a nice young fellow, that Number Twenty-nine!" said the woman, in a voice which sounded exactly as if it were speaking through a bassoon. "Perhaps you would like to play the same trick? But you will not, I can tell you! I shall keep an uncommon sharp look out upon you, Thirty—I shall!"

"But what do you mean?" asked Ciprina, in the most painful suspense.

"Now, do you mean to tell me that you did not hear all that noise during the early part of the night?" demanded the woman: "or it wasn't the night at all—for it was last evening, very soon after you retired to bed. There was a trampling of horses, and hurrying and scurrying—and running about hither and thither——"

"But what for?" asked Ciprina. "I heard nothing of all this!—nothing, I can assure you!"

"Well then, if you did not—and if you cannot guess——But no! I daresay you are really ignorant upon the point!—for of course it was a sudden thought on the part of the young man—though if you yourself are a good and pious Catholic, you will confess that it was most abominable to treat our dear young chaplain in such a way!—to stun him outright—bind and gag him—

strip him of his canonicals—Oh! it was shocking: shocking!"

"Thank God he has escaped!" mentally ejaculated Ciprina: for though the matron had not said so, yet she fully comprehended that such must be the case: and she could scarcely restrain the audible expression of her joyous emotions.

"Yes—all this he did!—and the worst of it is there's no trace of him!" continued the female turnkey. "The Governor is furious—the signora is dreadfully afflicted—and as for the signoretta——"

"The signoretta can perhaps speak for herself, worthy Gudulla," said a soft musical voice from the doorway; and the door being pushed open, Carlotta Belluno made her appearance. "It is my father's command that my mother and myself pay more than our usual heed to the female prisoners; and therefore I am making a round somewhat earlier than usual. Number Thirty," she said, but speaking in a tone as if it pained her thus to address the beautiful Ciprina, "I hope you have slept well? Though you are a prisoner here, there is no desire to persecute you!"—and she looked significantly towards Gudulla.

"Thanks, signoretta," exclaimed Ciprina, "for these kind and encouraging words. But I understand that something has occurred during the night——"

"Ah! Gudulla has not told you?" ejaculated Carlotta.

"I have told Number Thirty a dozen times over," said the bassoon-voiced woman, "that Number Twenty-nine has escaped."

"Well, well," interjected Carlotta, "I am just going with my pass-key to peep in on the other two female captives; and then I will return and pass ten minutes or a quarter of an hour with you, Number Thirty."

Carlotta glided out of the cell; and on gaining the court-yard, she flung an anxious glance towards the folding-gates at the extremity. At that very instant the gates opened; and the two bakers appeared, with their immense basket slung to the pole over their shoulders, as we have already described it. Carlotta's countenance brightened up—her eyes swept their looks around—no one but the two bakers were in view—and she sped towards them. Some few words were interchanged; and then the fair Carlotta slipped a note into the hands of one of the men, together with a piece of money, saying, "Be sure you deliver it to him the moment you leave the castle!"

"That moment, signora!" was the reply; and the baker consigned both the billet and the coin to his pocket.

Almost immediately afterwards Carlotta Belluno returned to Ciprina's cell, entering it by means of the pass-key which she possessed. The beautiful prisoner, having risen from her pallet, was now performing her toilet—at which Carlotta good-naturedly assisted her. We should observe that Gudulla, the female-turnkey, had retired, and the two young ladies were therefore alone together.

"It is really true that Number Twenty-nine has effected his escape," said Carlotta. "I am sure you will forgive me for yielding to the regulations of this fortress, and speaking of the captives by numerals only—addressing you also in the same

way: but it has become so completely a habit with me——"

"And moreover it is your duty, signora," responded Ciprina; "so that you really need not offer any excuse, nor make any apology to me."

"You are very kind to speak thus," said Carlotta. "Come—sit down and partake of your breakfast; and I will remain a little while to converse with you—that is to say, if my presence be not disagreeable?"

"On the contrary!" exclaimed Ciprina; "I am infinitely grateful for such kind companionship. But how did Signor De Vere—I mean Number Twenty-nine make his escape?"

Carlotta gave Ciprina a few particulars relative to our hero's escape; and although the Governor's daughter naturally told the tale as if Father Falconara had been overpowered by the superior strength of a desperate man,—yet Ciprina could not help thinking that it was all the result of a friendly collusion between Charles and the young priest. Little, however, did it matter whether the incident had occurred in one way or the other, since the main fact was the same—and this was that Charles De Vere had effected his escape.

"Ah! and that is not all," said Carlotta: "but I must inform you that this young gentleman—Number Twenty-nine—I do not ask you whether he is any relation of yours, or in what light he stood towards you—but I know that you were brought hither together——"

"He is no relation, answered Ciprina; "and he stands towards me in no other light than that of a simple acquaintance. Therefore you may speak unreservedly, signora."

"Oh! I was not going to say any harm of him," rejoined Carlotta: "I was merely about to observe that he is evidently a very brave man—yes, even a desperado one; for he completely conquered three of our men, who rode after him. Two of them were seriously injured——"

"Ah! I am sorry to hear this," exclaimed Ciprina: "I mean I regret to learn that there should have been any necessity for such violence. But you cannot blame the young gentleman, signora——"

"On the contrary," rejoined the young lady, lowering her voice and bending a significant look upon Ciprina; "I rather admire him for it. Do permit me to ask one question! Is he an Englishman or a Frenchman?—for my father insists upon it that he is a Frenchman—while our reverend chaplain, the good Father Falconara, declares that he is an Englishman."

"He is assuredly an Englishman," responded Ciprina. "That he was arrested by mistake—indeed that he was taken for a young Frenchman—is most certain! For that I can vouch——"

"Do not speak too loud," said Carlotta; "for this is a forbidden topic—and if that graver-looking old wretch were listening at the door——"

"Ah, my dear signora!" exclaimed Ciprina, "I would not for the world compromise you! How kind is your conduct towards me! You are not treating me as a prisoner——"

"I confess that I have conceived a liking for you," rejoined Carlotta; "and I wish to heaven it were in my power to do something to alleviate the affliction of your captivity——aye, or even to release you from it altogether."

"Towards the alleviation of the misery attendant upon my prisonage, you are doing everything that lies in your power," said Ciprina. "Kind language—kind looks——"

"Oh! I begin to feel a very sincere friendship for you!" interjected Carlotta, taking the beautiful captive's hand and pressing it with warmth. "But we were talking of that young gentleman who escaped in so daring and gallant a manner. And so he is an Englishman?"

"I am all the better able to certify the fact," returned Ciprina, "because I myself first knew him in England."

"And you?" said Carlotta: "I see that you are not an Italian—you do not look like a French woman: perhaps you likewise are English?"

"Yes—England is my native country," rejoined Ciprina: and for a moment her bosom heaved with a sigh, as she thought of her cousin Agnes whom she had so abruptly left, and the happy home at Sidney Villa which she had likewise so precipitately abandoned.

"Ah, you are an Englishwoman?" ejaculated Carlotta. "Oh, I like the English, I can assure you! There are two English families settled at Bagnò. I knew them well—they give excellent entertainments. Indeed, last night I was at a very pleasant party at the house of one of those families, when the tidings came of the prisoner's escape. But what did you say his name was? Do not speak too loud! Remember that I am transgressing regulations!"

"His name is De Vere," returned Ciprina; "and I am very much mistaken if the Tuscan Government will not be called to account for his arrest, because he is attached to the British Embassy at Naples."

"The British Embassy at Naples?" exclaimed Carlotta Bellano, almost bounding upon her seat, so strong was the feeling of surprise which seemed to take possession of her. "The Embassy at Naples?" she repeated.

"Yes," rejoined Ciprina; "I can assure you I am telling you the truth. Why do you look so amazed?"

Carlotta blushed—hesitated—and then said, "Perhaps—perhaps—you likewise have been at Naples?"

"Yes," answered Ciprina; "and I saw Charles De Vere there: consequently I know that I am telling you nothing that is not consistent with the exact truth."

"How extraordinary! how very extraordinary!" murmured Carlotta, as if thus musing with herself: then, no renewed blushes dyed her cheeks, she said, "Perhaps you are acquainted with some others of the attachés?—perhaps you can name them?"

"I know them all by name," answered Ciprina, wondering why the young damsel was giving this turn to the discourse. "First there is Sir Alexander Holcroft——"

"Ah!"—and though the ejaculation on Carlotta's part was scarcely audible, yet Ciprina's ear did catch it; and stopping short, she surveyed the Governor's daughter with increasing wonder and curiosity.

"Yes—Sir Alexander Holcroft," proceeded Ciprina,—“is a polished gentleman—with fasci-

nating manners and distinguished appearance—very rich—”

But again she stopped short; for Carlotta's cheeks were now scarlet, and she was trembling all over with nervousness and confusion. Joy was however gleaming in her eyes; and Ciprina perceived that the topic was an agreeable one. She therefore went on to say, “Sir Alexander Holcroft is a fine specimen of an English gentleman: he is tall and good-looking—intelligent—and endowed with great conversational powers. He is about five-and-thirty years of age; but he does not look more than eight-and-twenty.”

Ciprina made a few additional observations eulogistic of Sir Alexander Holcroft; but she did not think it worth while to say that he bore a reputation for unprincipled profligacy amongst the fair sex. Ciprina saw that by praising the Baronet she was pleasing the Governor's daughter; and it was naturally her object to win Carlotta's friendship; for who could tell what service the young lady might become capable of rendering her?

“And I also know Sir Alexander Holcroft,” said Carlotta, after a pause. “But I must leave you now! My father and mother will be waiting at the breakfast-table for me! I will return and see you presently.”

Carlotta gave her hand to the captive; and then she passed out from the cell: but ere she closed the door, she flung a significant look upon Ciprina, as much as to imply that a friendly understanding was now established between them.

When Ciprina was alone, she reflected on all that had just taken place; and she said to herself, “Is it not possible that I may turn Carlotta's friendship to advantage? Who knows? She possesses a pass-key! But Ah! I may rest full well assured that after the escape of Charles De Vere, the utmost vigilance will be maintained throughout the fortress. However, I can do no possible harm by cultivating the good feelings with which I have already inspired Carlotta. Who knows how long it may be ere Charles shall be enabled to effect my deliverance? He himself may be recaptured yet?—at this very moment he may be a prisoner? Or even if he has already succeeded in reaching Florence, or shall succeed in so doing—there may be obstacles and there may be delays: in short, I ought to be prepared for every contingency. And then too it is delightful to have the companionship of this girl, even though she be a singular compound of simplicity and silliness, ignorance and giddiness. Ah! she knows Sir Alexander Holcroft? But how and where? She loves him—or at least she has listened favourably to some tale which he has breathed in her ear? This is certain! I must obtain all her secrets from her when she returns presently!”

At about noon the two bakers reappeared in the court-yard, carrying their enormous basket between them. At the same moment Carlotta Belluno emerged from the side door opening into that yard; and after sweeping her looks around, she advanced towards the foremost baker as stealthily as she had done a few hours previously. The man hastily slipped a billet into her hand,—at the same time whispering, “We know what we have to do, signora—and you are to say yes or no.”

Carlotta did not exactly understand what the man meant: but she naturally thought that it bore some reference to the contents of the billet which had just been slipped into her hand. She therefore hastened towards Ciprina's cell; and in the recess or little archway in which the doorway was set, Carlotta hastily ran her eyes over the note. She now became agitated with very powerful emotions: there was even an instant when she clung to the wall for support: but quickly recovering herself, she mentally ejaculated, “Yes, yes—it must be so!”

Hastily thrusting the billet into her bosom, she passed out again into the court-yard, and approached the entrance of the bread-store, where the two bakers were now delivering their bread to the turnkey whose duty it was to receive it, and who held a slate in his hand to keep a correct account. The man who acted as the intermediary of Carlotta's mysterious correspondence, approached her; and she emphatically whispered, “Yes!—I will do it!”

He seemed fully to comprehend her meaning; for he bent upon the lady a significant look, adding, “At two o'clock precisely we shall return.”

“At two o'clock?” echoed Carlotta. “No! it cannot be done at that hour! My father will wait me. You must come later—at half-past three, for instance—”

“Impossible, signora!” rejoined the baker. “Everything is settled for two o'clock—if it is to be done at all!”

Carlotta seemed cruelly perplexed for a few moments; but as an idea suddenly struck her, her countenance brightened up—and she rejoined, “Yes—it can be managed at two punctually!”

She then retraced her way across the court-yard, and passed into Ciprina's cell. The young English lady was anxiously awaiting her return; and the meeting was fraught with the utmost friendliness on both sides, just as if they were old acquaintances, and likewise as if they had been some time asunder instead of the brief interval of three hours.

“Tell me,” said Carlotta,—“tell me, I beseech you—have you any hope that your young English friend will be enabled to accomplish your deliverance from the fortress?”

“Why do you ask?” inquired Ciprina, not knowing how to shape her response.

“Because if you are not quite sure of the assistance of your English friend,” replied Carlotta, “I think—indeed I am sure—Oh, yes! I will faithfully promise to use all the interest I can command—and that would be great—”

“Excellent friend!” cried Ciprina, seizing the young damsel's hand and pressing it with fervour: “I believe you! I know that you would do everything you could for me! Oh, if it were in my power to evince my gratitude by rendering you any service in return—”

“It is in your power—and you can render me such service,” interrupted Carlotta. “Time is precious—and I have many explanations to give. Oh! though we have known each other but a few hours, it seems to me as if the friendship of years existed between us. I am going to make you my confidante—”

“Yes—give me your confidence, my dear Car-

lotta!" said Ciprina; "for if it really be in my power to advise or to assist you, I will do it! Come, let me help you towards imparting this confidence—let me make a conjecture. You love Sir Alexander Holcroft?"

"Yes—and he loves me in return," replied the blushing Carlotta. "He has offered to make me his wife."

"Has he demanded your hand in marriage of your father?" asked Ciprina.

"No—he has not dared: for I have told him how useless it would be! My father detests the English. Besides, he has promised my hand to an old nobleman—a man who by his years might be my great grandfather. Ah! is not this shocking, my dear friend?"

"Shocking!" echoed Ciprina. "You think, therefore, that your father would prove inexorable?"

"Ah! if you knew my father," rejoined Carlotta, "you would not ask such a question! Yes—he would prove inexorable—and he would overwhelm me with his anger! You see therefore—"

"I see," said Ciprina, "that your parents are in total ignorance—at least I presume the Signora Belluno is thus ignorant, as well as your father?"

"Yes—both my parents. And I have not even revealed my love for the English Baronet, in the confessional to Father Falconara."

"Where did you first meet Sir Alexander Holcroft?" asked Ciprina.

"He has been staying for the last two months with one of the English families to which I just now alluded, and who are settled at Bagno. It seems that he had a very severe illness in the summer at Naples: his physicians recommended him to roost the Apennine breezes—he had friends at Bagno—and therefore he came hither. I have met him at parties—"

"And elsewhere perhaps, my dear Carlotta," said Ciprina, with an arch smile. "Lovers always have their secret meetings—in some shady grove, or on the bank of some pellucid stream—"

"I have never once been alone with Sir Alexander Holcroft," replied Carlotta. "Oh! you would be amazed if you knew how completely I am the victim of parental despotism! My father never permits me to pass out of the fortress alone. In this sense I am almost as much a captive as you yourself are! And think of the humiliation, my dear friend!—if at this very moment I were to go and present myself at the outer-gate of the castle—Ah! would you believe it? that gate would remain closed against me! And yet I declare to you most solemnly that I have never done anything to provoke this utter want of confidence on the part of my parents!"

"But if you have had no opportunities of meeting Sir Alexander Holcroft alone," said Ciprina, "you must at least have established some means of maintaining a correspondence with him?"

"Ah, yes," said Carlotta, a deep blush mantling upon her countenance. "It was he who arranged that means of correspondence—and Oh! he has written me such beautiful letters! so full of protestations of love—yes, and so complimentary to myself!"

"And he has promised to espouse you?" said Ciprina.

"Yes—faithfully promised. Oh, he is the very soul of honour!" exclaimed Carlotta Belluno. "Of this I have been convinced from the very outset of our acquaintance: but I was nevertheless well pleased to hear all the eulogies which you just now passed upon him. Ah! it is impossible to help loving him—and he has said the same to me in his letters! Last night at this party—where, by the bye, there were some more English guests—they are travelling on their way from Ravenna to Florence, and they have stopped for a few days at Bagno—I will mention their names in case you should happen to know them. There are the Hon. Hector and Mrs. Hardress—"

"Ah, Cicely!" ejaculated Ciprina, with a look of surprise. "Yes—I know her well—and her husband Mr. Hardress too."

"And there is his sister the Hon. Miss Josephine Hardress," continued Carlotta—"a sweet charming young lady! Mrs. Hardress herself is a very fine woman. What a beautiful complexion! what softness in her large blue eyes! what superb teeth! The only fault in her face is that her lips seem to be somewhat too full, giving a certain prominence to the mouth—"

"Ah! but you are forgetting all your own narrative, my dear friend!" interrupted Ciprina.

"Pray proceed. You just now said that time was precious—"

"And heaven knows it is so!" responded Carlotta emphatically. "But I am so bewildered—so agitated—and so confused—yes, and I am also ashamed to tell you—I feel half-frightened—"

"What! are you afraid of me?" asked Ciprina reproachfully. "Have I not vowed to serve you, if possible, to the utmost?"

"Oh, I will tell you everything!" cried the young damsel, flinging her arm round Ciprina's neck. "There is to be an afternoon *conversazione* to-day: it is to commence between one and two o'clock—and Ah! my dear friend, last evening Sir Alexander whispered some few words in my ear—they conveyed a request—and I gave an affirmative reply—"

"I think I begin to understand," said Ciprina, who saw that unless she encouraged Carlotta to proceed, the explanations never would be finished.—"I think I begin to understand what the request was to which your affirmative answer was given. Sir Alexander Holcroft proposed an elopement?"

Carlotta blushed a deeper scarlet than ever, as she falteringly murmured, "Yes—it was so."

"Well," continued Ciprina; "and now I suppose something has occurred to derange the plan?"

"Alas, yes!" responded Carlotta. "My father and mother will not go to the *conversazione*, in consequence of the escape of the English gentleman—they do not feel in a humour to mix in society—"

"And they will not suffer you to go alone?" said Ciprina inquiringly.

"I could no more proceed to that *conversazione* by myself," replied the young damsel, "than you, my dear friend, have a chance of crossing the threshold of the fortress within the next five minutes. Oh, is it not distressing?"

"But surely Sir Alexander Holcroft," said



Ciprina, "has ingenuity enough to suggest some plan, and money enough to ensure its execution? Come—tell me, Carlotta!—You have found means to communicate with him—have you not?"

"Yes—early this morning I sent him a note," responded the damsel; "and just now I received the reply."

"Ah, well then," ejaculated Ciprina, "I see that there is no need to despair, since Sir Alexander is not inactive. But what does he propose?"

"The plan is admirable—all is arranged so far as Sir Alexander is concerned,—and it could not possibly fail of success: only—"

"Ah, another obstacle! Come, I will wager it is not insuperable?" exclaimed Ciprina. "What is it?"

"Sir Alexander has made his arrangements," replied Carlotta, "for the execution of the plan at two o'clock precisely; and these arrangements cannot now be altered. But my father said to me

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at breakfast time, that since he did not feel in a humour to take me to the *conversations*, he would accompany me for a ride on horseback; and he bade me be in readiness a few minutes before two. Thus, you perceive, my dear friend—"

"I perceive, Carlotta, that you are approaching the point at which you will explain how I can possibly serve you."

"Yes—I am approaching that point," rejoined Carlotta. "Ah, my dear friend! if through you I should succeed in effecting my escape from the fortress at two o'clock—for a veritable escape it would be—I should never forget your kindness; but I would at once urge Sir Alexander to lose no time in taking the initiative if necessary, or in succouring Signor De Vere's endeavours, as the case may be, towards effecting your liberation."

"Apart from any such motive," returned Ciprina, who deemed it prudent to adopt as unselfish a demeanour as possible, "I shall be only too

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glad to render you my assistance. Now then, Carlotta, to the point!"

"The female turnkey Gudulla will be here presently," proceeded the young damsel; "and if you signify to her your desire to pay your devotions in the chapel, the request will be immediately conveyed to my father, and his reply will be in the affirmative."

"But how will this serve your purpose?" asked Ciprina.

"Because my mother, who is a great devotee and is very fond of compelling me to attend the chapel as often as possible, will be sure to throw out a hint to the effect that I should do well to be present with you, as you are a newly arrived prisoner—"

"In short, my dear Carlotta," interrupted Ciprina, "you are so sure of being enabled to manage the point with your father, that it is needless for us to discuss it. Well then, so much the better! But now give me your confidence entirely—and tell me how the final arrangements are to be carried out for your liberation."

"Yes—I will tell you everything," exclaimed Carlotta. "The plan is wonderfully ingenious; and yet, my dear friend, I am afraid you will laugh when I explain it—you will think it very ridiculous—and really I must confess that it is but little consistent with the policy and romance of a love-affair."

"No matter, my dear Carlotta," said Ciprina, "provided the desired end can be attained. You are so diffident and timid! Do speak out! What is this plan that has been devised?"

"Perhaps you may have noticed," continued the young damsel, "the mode in which the bread is brought into the fortress?"

Ciprina started—and she was suddenly seized with a violent inclination to burst out laughing; for a suspicion of Carlotta's meaning had fled upon her mind. She however kept her countenance as she said, "Yes—I have observed that the bread is brought into the castle in enormous panniers or baskets."

"And it is in one of those baskets," rejoined Carlotta, "that I presently hope to pass through the gates of the fortress."

"Ah!" said Ciprina: but she now experienced no inclination to laugh:—on the contrary, she reflected profoundly for nearly a minute. "Then I suppose," she at length said, "that everything is arranged with the bakers who bring in the bread?"

"Yes—everything," responded Carlotta. "To tell you the truth, my dear Ciprina, it is one of those men who has served as an intermediary of correspondence between Sir Alexander and myself. I think you now understand—"

"I understand everything," interjected Ciprina. "But at what hour does Father Falconara attend in the chapel?"

"At about a quarter before two. He enters the confessional at once—that is to say, if there be any person present who desires his sacred ministrations. It will be necessary for me to go through the ceremony first, because it is always my custom to do so when I accompany any female prisoner into the chapel; and if I were on this occasion to deviate from the rule, it would

seem strange to the old sextoness. Besides, the ceremony, so far as I am concerned, will be over just about two o'clock—it will not then seem singular if I quit the chapel without waiting for you—"

"Enough, my dear Carlotta!" interrupted Ciprina: "I comprehend it all!—the plan is most admirably arranged!—and it cannot possibly fail to succeed! Most cheerfully shall I assist you to the extent that you require."

The young damsel threw her arms about Ciprina's neck, and embraced her fervently.

"I must now leave you," she said; "Gudulla will be here almost immediately—and you must make your request in reference to the chapel. It is close upon one o'clock," added Carlotta, looking at her watch. "In another hour—"

"In another hour," rejoined Ciprina, "you will be thinking of a speedy meeting with an ardent lover."

Carlotta Belluno flung a look of gratitude upon her new friend, and then issued forth from the cell.

Shortly after one o'clock the rough-voiced Gudulla made her appearance, followed by another female turnkey bearing Ciprina's dinner; and then the captive proffered the demand in reference to the chapel.

"I will see that your wish is at once conveyed to the Governor, Number Thirty," answered Gudulla, who was now exceedingly polite and civil after her own fashion to Ciprina, because she had seen that the beautiful captive was in favour with the Governor's daughter.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BASKET.

It was about twenty minutes to two o'clock when Carlotta Belluno returned to the cell of her friend Ciprina. The young lady had thrown on a species of mantilla, or cloak, with a hood fringed with a deep black lace, which might serve as a veil in case of need. She had also secured about her person the articles of jewellery which she possessed; and as she entered the cell, Ciprina immediately perceived that she had been weeping.

"Do you repeat the step which you are about to take, Carlotta?" she inquired.

"Oh, so! no!" responded the young damsel fervently. "But still, my dear friend, it was a painful thing for me to leave my father and mother in such a way—then to fling a last look as it were upon my home! Ah, Ciprina! you cannot be surprised if I felt all this, and if for an instant I was overpowered by the violence of my emotions!"

"Yes, Carlotta, it was natural," replied Ciprina. "But now you are courageous—"

"Oh, yes!—courageous and resolute!" was the answer. "And, Ah! my dear friend, what an immense debt of gratitude shall I owe you!"

"Do not speak of it. I shall miss you, dear Carlotta!—but still I have every reason to hope that my own sojourn here will not be a lengthy one, and we shall perhaps soon meet again."

"Oh, what happiness that would be!" ejacu-

lated Carlotta. "We should then talk over everything which is now occurring!—Ah, and we should laugh too at the incident of the huge basket!"

"Oh, yes! depend upon it we will yet see happy days together—and we will laugh and rejoice as we think of the perplexities and embarrassments of the present moment! But tell me, my dear Carlotta—did everything take place as you had foreseen?"

"Everything was even more propitious than I could have anticipated," responded the young dame; "for the moment I entered the room where my parents were seated, my father said that he could not accompany me for the promised ride, because he must draw up a report of everything that had occurred in reference to the escape of the young prisoner last night. This report he will have to send off to the Minister of Police in Florence."

"And thus," said Ciprina, "everything proceeded to your utmost satisfaction?"

"Yes: your message in reference to the chapel was duly delivered to my father—and then my mother began to read me a long lecture on the necessity of being regular in my devotions and attending the confessional often; for you must know that she has become very devout of late—she thinks Father Falconara the best preacher she ever heard—"

"Is it not time for us to proceed to the chapel?" asked Ciprina.

"Yea. Come!" replied Carlotta, after consulting her watch. "Have you a veil? If not, I must run and fetch you one. I really quite forgot it!"

"I have one," returned Ciprina,—"a thick black one. And here it is?"

"You must put it on, in order to visit the chapel," said Carlotta; "because as a matter of course, the priest is not supposed to know who it is that enters the confessional."

Thus speaking, she drew the hood of her own mantel over her countenance: Ciprina put on her bonnet, and folded the thick black veil over her face. The two young ladies then issued from the cell: they crossed the court-yard—they reached the door of the chapel, which was standing ajar.

"I suppose it is you, signora?" said the old sextoness to Carlotta Belluno, whom she recognised by her mantle.

"It is I," answered the dame: "and this is a prisoner—Number Thirty—who comes with me by my father's permission."

The sextoness stood aside; Carlotta and Ciprina passed on. In a few minutes they beheld a door open at the other extremity of the chapel—and Father Falconara made his appearance: but he almost instantaneously vanished again, for he passed into the vestry to put on his surplice. He soon issued thence again, and proceeded towards the confessional. Carlotta and Ciprina were now kneeling on hassocks at a little altar near the confessional; and the priest could not as a matter of course distinguish who they were, their countenances being concealed. So soon as they heard the door of the confessional close behind him, Carlotta hastily pressed Ciprina's hand as an indication that the important moment was now approaching; and she at once passed into the

darkened nook forming one-half of the confessional, while the priest was seated in the other.

How hurried and anxious was now the glance which Ciprina flung towards the dial of the clock in front of the centre gallery! It wanted only five minutes to two: Father Falconara had been a few minutes later than usual. Ciprina next looked towards the door: the old sextoness was still stationed there. Ciprina swept her glances around: not another soul was to be seen in the chapel, besides those whom the reader already knows to be there. Ah! if that sextoness would but move away from the vicinity of the door, there would be no one to watch Ciprina's actions or to suspect them! But the old harridan seemed to stick fast at that door: and the young lady thought to herself, "It is only too clear that as I entered in the company of the Governor's daughter, I shall not be permitted to go forth alone."

But scarcely had she made this reflection, when a gentle knocking was heard at the door by which Father Falconara had entered the chapel. This door opened from the male compartment of the prison; and some of the inmates of that compartment were now coming, in the custody of a turnkey, to attend the priest's ministrations. The old sextoness hastened across the chapel to open the door to which we have just alluded.

With what exultation leapt Ciprina's heart! She glided away from the front of the little altar in the immediate vicinity of the confessional: she dived down a narrow passage betwixt the amphitheatrically arranged rows of seats; and unperceived by a soul, she gained the door opening into the yard belonging to the female compartment. A glance towards the further extremity of that yard, showed her that the bakers were there; and one of them was lounging, as if with a negligent air, against the large basket, so that Ciprina felt convinced it had been already emptied of its contents. Oh! how her heart palpitated as she at once and unhesitatingly bent her steps towards the basket, her countenance completely concealed by the veil which she held in double or treble folds over her features.

When she was within a dozen paces of the basket, the baker who was leaning against it, gave a short cough; and his companion immediately came forth from the store-room, where he had been having a few minutes' chat with the warder whose duty it was to receive the bread and take an account of it.

What followed was the work of a moment. Both the bakers swept their looks round with lightning rapidity; and then being convinced that they were unobserved, one of them tilted up the basket in such a manner that Ciprina was enabled at once to step into it. The green baize cloth was thrown over her—the two bakers took the extremities of the pole upon their shoulders—and away they went, one humming a tune and the other whistling in an equally off-hand *nonchalant* manner. Just at the very moment that the gates of the other extremity of the yard were thrown open, the clock of the castle proclaimed the hour of two.

Nothing would have surprised Ciprina less than to have heard a shriek pealing through the air—a scream from the lips of Carlotta Belluno—or else the rushing forward of the young dame to de-

mand why the basket was borne off ere she had entered it? But there was no molestation or hindrance of either kind. We have said that Father Falconara was a few minutes late in the chapel on the present occasion; and thus Carlotta could not escape from the confessional with such exceeding punctuality.

The gates of the yard closed behind the bakers and their basket: another yard was traversed—there was more opening and shutting of gates—and each stoppage, if only for an instant, appeared to Ciprina to be a perfect age. At length the outer gates were cleared; and Ciprina was fairly beyond the threshold of the castle. Oh, if her heart had previously been beating anxiously or exultingly, how much more anxiously, and how much more exultingly did it now beat!—anxiously, because she dreaded lest any misadventure might cause her to be retaken and borne back into the castle—and exultingly, because thus far success was so complete!

For the first fifty yards or so after the threshold of the castle was crossed, the two bakers pursued their way at the same deliberate pace as at first, because they were still within view of the sentries at the portals; but they soon quickened their course—and as they abruptly turned to the right, it was a positive run which they made of it for nearly a hundred yards. Then they abruptly stopped short—the basket touched the ground—in a moment it was tilted up—and Ciprina stepped forth, still keeping her veil densely folded over her countenance.

"There, signora! behind that clump of trees yonder!" cried one of the men quickly; and away sped the liberated lady as if it were really for her very life that she was running.

At the same moment the two bakers, catching up the pole on their shoulders, again hastened back into the straight road which led into Bagno, where they presented themselves at their master's shop with an air of as much coolness as if nothing unusual had taken place.

Meanwhile Ciprina was speeding towards the clump of trees which had been pointed out to her, and which was at a distance of nearly a hundred and fifty yards from the spot where she had stepped out of the basket. The instant she reached that tuft of evergreens, Sir Alexander Holcroft sprang forward, and was about to catch her in his arms, when Ciprina suddenly threw back her veil, at the same time bursting out into a merry laugh.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the Baronet: "Mrs Clifford?—Floriabel?"

"Yes—'tis I!" she exclaimed; "I who have just escaped from that fortress, and who now throw myself upon your generosity to convey me to some place of safety! Ah! you have a vehicle in readiness! Come! come!"

Thus speaking, Ciprina rushed towards the post-chaise and pair which stood farther behind the clump of trees; and as Sir Alexander's confidential valet was holding the door open in readiness, Ciprina sprang inside.

"But in the name of heaven," said the bewildered Baronet, thrusting his head into the vehicle without taking his seat in it, "what does all this mean?"

"It means, Sir Alexander," quickly rejoined

Ciprina, "that if you have a spark of true British chivalry in your composition, you will take pity on your fellow-countrywoman who has been infamously treated! As for your Carlotta, you must devise another stratagem for her rescue."

"By heaven, this is perplexing!" ejaculated Holcroft: then flinging himself into the chaise with what seemed to be a species of desperation, he added impetuously, "Drive on!"

The door was banged—the valet leapt up into the rattle—the postilion cracked his whip—and away went the equipage.

"Now that I am so readily obeying your adjuration, madam," said Holcroft, "and that I am abandoning some one else, I know not under what circumstances—pray be so kind as to give me an explanation in terms as concise as possible."

"A very few words will suffice," answered Ciprina. "Carlotta made me her confidant—and considering every stratagem to be fair that a captive adopts in a prison, I availed myself——"

"And therefore you came out in a basket!" ejaculated Holcroft: and his humour all in a moment changing, he burst out into the loudest and heartiest laugh in which he had indulged for years past.

Ciprina was glad that he now took the affair in such a jocular mood; and she laughed merrily likewise.

"This is excellent! This is capital!" exclaimed the Baronet, laughing again till the tears ran down his cheeks. "The only thing is that it is too good! For what the devil that poor Carlotta will think——"

"She will think that I have outwitted her," returned Ciprina.

"But what will she do?" cried Holcroft.

"She must wait until you devise another stratagem for her release," rejoined Ciprina.

"Poor creature! it is really too bad!" said the Baronet. "But after all, if you were a prisoner in that castle——"

"Yes," said Ciprina; "and I will give you some tidings which are calculated to astonish you still more. Your friend Charles De Vere——"

"One of the finest young fellows in all Christendom!" ejaculated Holcroft. "But you do not mean——"

"That he was in the fortress of Bagno—and that he escaped last night," said Ciprina.

"Good heavens! But how did all these things happen? Surely, my dear madam, you and Charles De Vere——"

"Sir Alexander Holcroft," interrupted Ciprina, seriously, "Charles De Vere is incapable of looking upon me otherwise than as a friend—an erring and a lost one! But he loves another——"

"Yes, yes—I know it!—your cousin Agnes?" exclaimed Holcroft. "We fought a duel on your account——"

"On my account?" cried Ciprina: and it was now her turn to experience an immeasurable surprise.

"Yes—on your account," rejoined the Baronet: and he at once gave some explanations.

"Charles De Vere is indeed a noble character!" murmured Ciprina: and then she in her turn began giving explanations, succinctly and rapidly showing how she and Charles had met in Florence at the Mirano mansion, and how they had been

made prisoners and hurried off to the fortress of Bagno.

"And now, I presume," said Holcroft, "that you are anxious to get back to Florence and trounce this Marchioness of yours as quick as possible?"

"Yes," returned Ciprina; "my object is to get to Florence without delay. But if you will only follow up your generosity so far as to find me some safe means of reaching the Tuscan capital, I will not ask you to accompany me further than is necessary."

"I will take you to the nearest town," replied the Baronet; "and there we will procure a post-chaise to convey you to Florence. I have some blank forms of passports about my person, severally signed by all the British diplomatists who happen to be scattered about amongst the petty States of Italy; and one of those forms can speedily be filled up to suit your personal appearance. With that passport no one will dare molest you; and inasmuch as captives making their escape from such comfortable places as Bagno, do not generally bring away much money with them, if you will permit me to become your banker——"

"This is the second time, Sir Alexander, that you will have rendered me a pecuniary service," replied the young lady. "A year back—in Naples—you sent me two thousand guineas. It was under peculiar circumstances—you were revoking a promise which you had made—and at the time I felt somewhat angry—though my position was such that it did not render me sufficiently independent to refuse your generous gift. Yet you must have thought it very strange that I did not acknowledge it——"

"I acquired the certainty that it was delivered into your hand," answered the Baronet; "and that was sufficient. Let us speak no more on the subject. Ah, by the bye! do you happen to have heard what has become of Theodore Clifford?"

"No," replied Ciprina. "What has happened to him?"

"About three weeks ago—or scarcely so much indeed—for if I recollect right, it was in the middle of October—and this is only the 3rd of November—is it?"

"Yes—the 3rd," answered Ciprina. "But what of Clifford?"

"He was killed in a duel, in the neighbourhood of London," returned the Baronet. "I read the account only two or three days ago in an English paper that was sent me. But it is extraordinary that the very person who killed him, should also have been at Bagno for the last two or three days—the Hon. Hector Hardress."

"Ah! Carlotta told me that she met that gentleman, his wife, and his sister at the same party the night before last where she likewise met you. But Clifford killed in a duel!—and by Hector Hardress!"

"Yes. It appears it was some dispute at cards—and I don't exactly know what. Of course, it was a delicate subject; and I could not touch upon it with Hardress—whom, by the bye, I only know slightly."

"And so Theodore Clifford is no more!" said Ciprina, in a low musing tone as she reflected on the death of the man who had first seduced her from the path of virtue: but not choosing to dwell

on topics which disagreeably reminded her of the past, she inquired, "Are those English people going to make a long stay at Bagno?"

"On the contrary," replied the Baronet: "I fancy they are going to leave this very day. I should be glad of the opportunity to place you amongst them—you would have companionship and protection to Florence——"

"No, no! that could not be!" interrupted Ciprina: "for Mr. Hardress knows me—and so does his wife. However, let us talk on some other subject. And now tell me candidly, do you love Carlotta Belluno?"

"I love her," answered the Baronet; "but not quite so much as I was prepared to love a certain Floribel Clifford—or Floribel Lister—a twelve-month back."

"Oh! we need not refer to that!" exclaimed Ciprina, laughing. "Do talk to me about Carlotta Belluno! Is it your intention to espouse her?"

"Really, my dear madam," rejoined the Baronet, "this is rather a home-thrust question: but still, if you insist upon having a reply, I must give it you in terms less satisfactory with respect to pretty Miss Belluno's hopes and ideas, than you may have probably anticipated."

"On the contrary, Sir Alexander," said Ciprina; "I was fully prepared to hear that you did ~~not~~ intend to espouse the poor, simple-minded, confiding girl. Yet she loves you!—yes, she does indeed love you!"

"Very likely, madam," said Holcroft, coolly. "If she had not conceived some affection for me, she would scarcely have consented to an elopement; for, as you say, she is simple-minded—and I think that her ideas are but little settled on the title or wealth which I may possess."

"It would be a pity, Sir Alexander," resumed Ciprina, in a strain of serious remonstrance, which was indeed most unusual with her,—“yes, it would be a pity, I repeat, to take advantage of that simple-mindedness—that love—that confidence——"

"My dear madam," interrupted Holcroft, "be so good as to recollect that I am devoting all possible interest and attention to your own affairs at the present moment: but I do not, on the other hand, ask you to interfere with mine. Ah! here we are at the town where we shall part company."

In a few minutes the chaise rolled into the place thus alluded to; and as it was not one through which Ciprina had previously passed, she had no fear of being recognised or molested. Besides, even if she were known, she felt that the presence of one of the superior members of the British Embassy to the Court of Naples, would serve as a shield and as a protection. The chaise drove up to the principal tavern in the town; and Ciprina being conducted to a private apartment, where refreshments were at once served up—Holcroft proceeded to make inquiries in reference to a vehicle to convey her on to Florence. While Ciprina was thus left alone in the parlour to which she had been shown, a handsome travelling-carriage and four horses drove up to the front of the hostelry. Ciprina glanced from the window; and she recognised Hector Hardress, who was seated on the box next to his valet, and smoking

a cigar. The Hon. Mrs. Hardress, whom Ciprina had known as Cicely Neale, looked out of the carriage-window as Sir Alexander Holcroft hastened forward to speak to her. There was another lady inside the carriage; and Ciprina had no doubt that this was Josephine Hardress, of whose beauty Carlotta Belluno had spoken in such high terms. At first Hardress merely looked round, nodded, and went on smoking his cigar; but in a few minutes he seemed to grow interested in the conversation, whatever its nature might be. At length Sir Alexander Holcroft retreated from the travelling-carriage, re-entered the tavern, and ascended to the parlour where he had left Ciprina.

"My dear madam," he said, with a half-goodnatured, half-familiar smile of triumph, "the Hon. Hector and Mrs. Hardress, together with the Hon. Miss Josephine, send you their compliments through me, and beg that you will take a place in their travelling-carriage."

"You do not mean this, Sir Alexander!" ejaculated Ciprina in amazement.

"I mean it, my dear madam. It is as I tell you."

"But you must have made some misrepresentation! You must have forgotten that they know me!" cried the young lady.

"I have made no misrepresentation—and I have forgotten nothing. I simply told them," continued Sir Alexander Holcroft, "that Miss Lister—I knew not what other name to give you—was here, most anxious to get to Florence, having escaped by extraordinary means out of the fortress of Bagno."

"But in one word, Sir Alexander, understand me!" ejaculated Ciprina. "Mrs. Hardress was a Miss Neale—and she knows me well. The Hon. Hector Hardress used at one time to visit at the house where I dwelt: he likewise knows me. They both know that I fled with Theodore Clifford; and of course they have by this time told the same to their sister Josephine, even if she were not previously acquainted with the circumstance."

"All this is very likely and very true," answered Holcroft: "but those two ladies and that gentleman will treat you with the utmost courtesy and distinction. Now, you are a woman of the world—I will tell you how the game stands—and then you can play your cards according to your own inclination."

"Ah! if you will be explicit," said Ciprina, "I shall know how to act!"

"When the carriage drove up to the door," resumed the Baronet, "I went out and spoke to the occupants. I then began telling a long story to Mrs. Hardress—how a fellow-countrywoman of her's found herself in certain perplexities and embarrassments—and how it was a matter of life and death for her to get on without delay to Florence. I then spoke of Bagno and the escape; and having thoroughly enlisted the attention and interest of the two ladies, I mentioned *your* name—Floribel Lister. The countenance of Mrs. Hardress became clouded: that of Josephine showed that she knew who you were. I thought the point was lost,—when, to my surprise, Hardress turned round upon the box, declaring that you were more to be pitied than blamed—that you had been innocently used by Clifford through the medium of

a mock-marriage—and that it was not your fault if you had been thus betrayed. This gave a complete turn in your favour, for Mrs. Hardress immediately appeared to recollect certain pieces of intelligence which she had at different times received from your cousin Agnes."

"And those pieces of intelligence?" inquired Floribel, quickly.

"That after separating from Clifford, you had retired into some seclusion, and were leading a perfectly pure, correct, and honourable life—and that after all there was really nothing bad known against you. Then I myself threw in a few words—the beautiful Josephine grew much interested in your behalf—indeed she also spoke in your favour—and the climax was that a hearty invitation was sent for you to join the party."

"Under these circumstances, I can no longer hesitate," rejoined Ciprina. "It is indeed an immense advantage to travel under such protection; and you have conferred an additional boon upon me."

Sir Alexander Holcroft sat down at the table, and speedily filled up one of the passport-forms which he carried about with him. He then, in a delicate manner, spoke of money-affairs,—whereupon Ciprina said, "I have in the hands of a Florence banker a very considerable portion of the amount which I received from your bounty a twelvemonth back. I have therefore no need of further funds—though you rightly conjectured that I am penniless at this moment; for everything of value which I had about me was taken by the officials of Bagno Castle."

"In that case," replied Sir Alexander, "you must permit me to be your banker for your immediate wants; because no one can tell what may happen on the road."

He hastily folded up in the passport a liberal sum in gold and bank-notes. He then exclaimed, with a sudden peal of hearty merriment, "By heaven! you bear about you certain indications of the mode of your escape!—in vulgar parlance, patches of flour upon your clothes;—and these must be taken off."

By means of his kerchief he speedily accomplished his object; and looking forth from the window, he said, "The post-horses are changed—the carriage is in readiness."

"Before we separate, Sir Alexander Holcroft," said Ciprina, in a voice that was full of emotion, "permit me to thank you most sincerely for the numerous kindnesses you have now rendered me within the brief space of two hours. But Ah! let me plead once more on behalf of that simple-minded creature Carlotta!—let me breathe one parting word to conjure you—"

"Madam," interrupted the Baronet coldly, "this is my affair. I know not in what position," he went on to say in his wonted tone of courteous familiarity, "your little stratagem at the castle may have left the poor girl—or whether I shall be enabled to make any fresh arrangements. But, however this may be, I beg that you will leave me to my own business in consideration of the zeal which I have shown in furthering your interests. And now permit me to hand you down to the carriage."

Ciprina dared not plead any further on Carlotta's behalf; and she forthwith accompanied

Sir Alexander Holcroft. He had in no way derived her in reference to the welcome which she might expect at the hands of those whom she was now to join. Cicely, at once addressing her as "Miss Lister," greeted her with cordiality, and introduced her to Josephine, who bent upon her a compassionating look. As for Hector Hardress, he tossed away his cigar, leapt down from the box, and spoke to Ciprina in the most friendly manner. She took her seat inside the carriage: Hector followed her into the vehicle—hands were shaken with Sir Alexander Holcroft—and the equipage rolled on its way.

At first Ciprina felt slightly embarrassed by the position in which she found herself; but this sense of awkwardness speedily wore off when she perceived in how agreeable and friendly a manner her companions were chatting with her. The fact was they all three believed that having been made Clifford's victim, she had since her separation from him led a virtuous life. Cicely was good-hearted after her own fashion; and she felt interested in the cousin of Agnes Evelyn. Josephine, having suffered as well as Floribel herself through the villany of Clifford, was naturally inclined to sympathise with her: while Hector, having remembered that Miss Lister was endowed with a transcending beauty, had instantaneously entertained certain hopes and ideas which rendered him thus anxious to have her as a travelling-companion. But during the journey Hector was completely on his guard; for he knew that his wife Cicely possessed keen eyes and a strong spirit—and he did not choose to excite her jealousy by any direct attentions towards Ciprina. As for Ciprina herself, she had not failed to comprehend Sir Alexander Holcroft's meaning, when he had said "that he would tell her how the game stood, and she might then play her cards according to her inclination;" for the description of Hector's ready interference on her behalf had afforded a clue to the Baronet's idea. In plain terms, Ciprina understood that she might make a conquest in this quarter, if she thought fit.

It occurred to her that Josephine Hardress was not altogether happy in her mind; for every now and then she sighed audibly, or else had some difficulty in repressing the sigh that was rising up into her throat. It also occurred to Ciprina that on two or three occasions Hector darted a quick look upon his sister, as if to recall her to herself; and that then Josephine gave a sudden start and assumed an air of gaiety. Ciprina fancied that Josephine was unhappy on account of her brother having been unfortunate enough to kill a person in a duel.

It was about six o'clock in the evening when the travelling-carriage entered the court-yard of one of the principal hotels in Florence. As usual, the domestics hurried out to receive the new arrivals; and as usual likewise, a number of beggars came grovelling towards them—for this exhibition of mendicancy is invariable within the precincts of Italian hosteleries. On entering the hotel, Hector gave one arm to his wife—the other to Ciprina—while Josephine followed; and this little preference towards Ciprina over his sister, was another proof for the young lady that the hint she had received from Sir Alexander Holcroft was well grounded, if she thought fit to profit by it.

Before concluding this chapter, it is necessary for a certain reason that we return to the Castle of Bagno, to see what there took place after the flight of Ciprina. We will at once direct attention to Carlotta Belluno, whom we left in the confessional, separated by the almost impervious screen of trellis-work from Father Falconara. The young priest, we have already said, was later than usual in the chapel; but his admonitions, so far from being abbreviated on that account, were somewhat lengthened—as if he deemed it needful to convince his penitent that because he was late it was no reason why he should be considered indolent or neglectful. Carlotta was quivering with suspense: she heard the clock strike two—and still the admonitions of the priest continued. However, she consoled herself with the idea that the bakers would be sure to stop a few minutes—and that they would not argue from her non-appearance at the exact moment, that she did not mean, or was unable, to keep the appointment at all. It was quite five minutes past two when Carlotta Belluno issued forth from the confessional. She then turned towards the altar where she had left Ciprina kneeling: but that young lady was not to be seen. Carlotta thought that she had simply strayed away into another part of the chapel; and she quickly made the circuit of the place to look for her. Not finding her, she said to herself, "Ciprina must have been taken ill and gone back to her cell. On no other account would the sextones have allowed her to pass."

Towards the door did Carlotta hasten: the old sextones was there; and the damsel inquired, "Where is the prisoner—Number Thirty—who entered with me?"

"I have not seen her, signora. Is she not still in the chapel?" asked the sextones.

"No. But perhaps you may have left this door for a moment or two?"

"Yes—to give admission to a couple of the male prisoners."

"Ah, well!" said Carlotta: "then Number Thirty may have gone into the yard to walk—or she may have returned to her cell if she be indisposed; and Gudulla may have given her admission thither."

"Very likely, signora," said the sextones, who for an instant had looked frightened, because the recollection of the escape of the preceding night was fresh in the minds of every individual within the castle walls.

Carlotta passed out into the yard with palpitating heart and quickly-beating pulses: but bakers and basket—where were they? Oh! perhaps they had not as yet come? It was only a few minutes past two; and they might not have been able to keep their appointment as punctually as they had expected. Carlotta ran across the yard to Ciprina's cell; she opened the door with her pass-key—Ciprina was not there!

"Well then, after all, I must have missed her in the chapel!" the damsel mentally ejaculated.

Back to the chapel she sped: Ciprina was not there. Carlotta knew not what to think: but not for a moment did she suspect what the actual truth might be.

"This is most extraordinary!" she said to the old sextones. "I cannot find her."

"You do not think, signora—you do not pos-

sibly thick," asked the old woman, quivering and trembling, "that she could have made her escape?"

"Oh, no! impossible!" ejaculated Carlotta, almost indignantly. "She would not! Besides, where was the opportunity—no doors were opened——"

"Only when the bakers came, signora," rejoined the sextoness. "But then the warders, and turnkeys, and sentinels——"

"The bakers?" echoed Carlotta, with a sudden tightening sensation at the heart. "No! no!—they have not come yet!"

"I beg your pardon, signora. They came—and they are gone. I looked out for a moment, and saw the basket in the yard——"

The unfortunate young lady could scarcely prevent a shriek from pealing forth from her lips: but by a mighty effort she so far restrained herself—though she became white as a sheet and leant against the wall for support.

"Ah, signora!" cried the sextoness; "you are now alarmed, I see!"

"Yes, yes! I am alarmed!" moaned the poor girl; for she comprehended it all.

The sextoness hastened to summon Gudulla: inquiries were promptly instituted—the alarm spread—no Ciprina was to be found! But not for a single instant did it seem to be suspected that Carlotta Belluno had taken any part in the beautiful captive's escape: nor did any conjecture point to the means by which that escape was accomplished.

The poor young lady experienced the most poignant affliction; and indeed she would have been overwhelmed by it if the very desperation of her position had not compelled her to exercise all her powers of self-command. Was it possible that the friend to whom she had so implicitly trusted, had so shamefully abused her confidence?—what would the Baronet think? In short, what was to be the end of all these complications? Such were the questions which Carlotta asked herself over and over again, a thousand times in the brief space of about half-a-dozen minutes: but she was soon overwhelmed by questions from other quarters. Her father was furious—her mother was in a state bordering on despair—Father Falconara was bewildered. But Carlotta's tale was apparently simple enough; and it was borne out by all circumstantial evidence. She had entered the chapel with Number Thirty. The sextoness had seen them both. Father Falconara had noticed them both—one in her mantilla, the other in her veil. Carlotta had entered the confessional, leaving Number Thirty kneeling at the altar. This also was corroborated by the sextoness. Afterwards Number Thirty was missing. Now, it was impossible to blame Carlotta. Father Falconara himself interfered on her behalf,—representing that it was clear no fault attached to the young lady; and Signora Belluno, quickly following on the same side as the young priest, took her daughter's part. The Governor ceased to upbraid Carlotta: and turning round upon Gudulla, accused her of some complicity in an escape which could not be otherwise accounted for. Gudulla, however, proved where she was during the special period in question; and thus the general bewilderment was increased. The bakers were thought of

—but only in respect to the opening of the gates to afford them ingress or egress: the sentinels and warders however satisfactorily showed that no one had accompanied the bakers out of the fortress. The circumstance was astounding: it was equally grave and serious—and the Governor trembled lest he should be displaced from his post. He first of all thought of proceeding in person to Florence to explain everything to the Minister of Police: but on maturer reflection he determined to remain at Bagno in order to prosecute his inquiries into the mysterious occurrence. But some one ought to repair to the Tuscan capital to see the Minister: a mere written report would not suffice under such circumstances. Scarcely had the Governor expressed the wish when Father Falconara volunteered to undertake the mission. The proposal was thankfully accepted; and at about four o'clock in the afternoon—a couple of hours after Ciprina's flight—the young priest set off for Florence.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE COUNT OF RAMORINO.

We must now introduce our readers into the mansion inhabited by Count Ramorino, the Minister of Police. This high functionary had his official residence and his private one: but it is at the latter where we shall now find him.

It was between six and seven o'clock in the evening of that same day on which Charles De Vere had arrived in Florence in company with the village magistrate, and Ciprina in the society of the Hardress family, that we shall find the Count of Ramorino pacing to and fro in an apartment at his own abode. The reader will remember that we have in a previous chapter described him as a fine tall man, in his fortieth year—with dark hair and eyes—with features which in their profile were handsome, but with something sinister in the expression of his countenance. His hair curled naturally; he wore a beard carefully trimmed, and shining with that gloss which is seen on the raven's wing. He always dressed elegantly; his manners were most affable; and in the saloons of fashion he was a polished gentleman. But on the darker side of his character the reader has already seen that he was a libertine in morals, and that he made use of his official power in a manner the most selfish, unscrupulous, and tyrannical.

As we have already said, we find the Count of Ramorino pacing to and fro in an apartment at his private residence. He was considerably agitated: his steps were uneven—his countenance frequently grew distorted with the strong feelings that were raging in his brain—and ever and anon he clenched his fists or worked his arms up and down spasmodically; so that the entire demeanour and conduct of the Minister of Police were indicative of mingled rage, affliction, and despair.

What was the cause of these powerful emotions on Ramorino's part? An explanation can speedily be given. He was a bachelor, as most of the Italian noblemen are; and he had recently lost very large sums. His finances were cruelly embarrassed—his private estates were mortgaged to



the very utmost—his bankers had sent him an intimation that his account was most unsatisfactory—and there was scarcely a money-lender in the Tuscan capital who was not the holder of bills and bonds bearing Ramorino's name, and on which a ruinous interest was accumulating. This amount of difficulties would have been sufficient to goad Ramorino's mind almost to madness: but yet it was not the full sum of the troubles which were now harassing, torturing, and indeed agonizing him. Those were difficulties which might be staved off for a period—patched up here, alleviated there—with the hope of complete redemption ultimately through the turning-up of some lucky chance. But there was an embarrassment of a far more grave and serious nature staring him in the face,—a difficulty which could not be postponed for even forty-eight hours. He stood upon the very verge of a precipice, into which he must inevitably plunge headlong unless the speediest

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succour arrived. But whence was such assistance to come, unless it were the work of a miracle?

We will describe as succinctly as possible the awfully perilous position in which Count Ramorino found himself placed. All the numerous clerks and *employés*, agents and subordinates, in the department of the police, received their salaries monthly. Every four weeks the Minister of Police drew the requisite amount from the Minister of Finance. Count Ramorino had just drawn this amount; and it had vanished from his grasp at the gaming-table. In the desperate hope of retrieving his shattered fortunes, he had plunged himself further down in the vortex of ruin. The Minister of Finance was a statesman of the most scrupulous exactitude and precision in all the affairs of his department: every one knew that punctually as the clock struck all demands on the Treasury were certain to be paid: Count Ramorino could not therefore throw upon the

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Minister of Finance the blame of the non-liquidation of the salaries in the police department. They ought to have been settled on the day of which we are now writing: if they were not paid on the following day, the matter would be talked of—the Minister of Finance would for his own credit's sake interfere—and if once the circumstances reached the ears of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, utter ruin would overtake Ramorino. Expulsion from his office would be followed by his consignment to one of those fortresses wherein he was so fond of immuring all those who appeared as obstacles in his path.

Thus hovering on the very brink of destruction, it was no wonder if the Count of Ramorino should be reduced to the state of mental desperation in which we now find him. He revolved a thousand projects in his mind: but none appeared to be susceptible of a sufficiently prompt execution to serve the urgency of his purpose. Something must be done within a few hours: it was not even a matter which could be postponed for a few days!

In the midst of his perplexity a footman entered; and the Minister of Police recovered himself so quickly that the man did not perceive there was anything peculiar on the part of his master.

"Please your Excellency," said the domestic, "the Marchioness of Mirano solicits an immediate audience."

"Ah, Lucrezia! how I have neglected her!" muttered Ramorino to himself: then turning to the footman, he said, "I will see her ladyship instantaneously."

In a few moments the Marchioness di Mirano entered the apartment; and the servant at once withdrew. An idea had already struck the Minister of Police: the Marchioness was rich—she might lend him the money which would save him from utter ruin, and leave him sufficient breathing time to retrieve his fallen fortunes. He therefore assumed his most affable demeanour; and straining Lucrezia to his breast, he said, "Ah! your presence here is alike a reproach and a pleasure!"

"I certainly was surprised, my dear Ramorino," she answered, "that you paid no heed to the messages and billets with which I deluged you yesterday and to-day."

"Oh, forgive me, Lucrezia!" ejaculated the Minister: "but I have been so fearfully harassed! Surely nothing has occurred to annoy you?—no new source of vexation has arisen? Ciprina and her French paramour have been disposed of?"

"Oh, everything has occurred to annoy me!" exclaimed the Marchioness, who was bewildered how to explain herself to such an extent as merely to invoke the Minister's aid, without engendering his suspicions in reference to the fearful crime which had proved the fruitful source of so many frightful embarrassments. "I could not conceive why you did not come to me—why you could not spare a single moment to drive to my mansion! I was afraid to enter into any particulars in the billets which I sent you——"

"I confess that I have been somewhat remiss, dear Lucrezia—and therefore did I ere now say that your presence is a reproach: for I ought to have gone to you, instead of compelling you to come to me. But what has happened?"

"You wrote me a note at an early hour yesterday morning, telling me that——"

"Yes—telling you that Ciprina and her lover—Bourdon I think you said his name was—had been arrested during the past night."

"But it was not so!" interjected the Marchioness, passionately.

"Not so?" echoed the Minister, in amazement. "What do you mean? My agents duly made their report to me——"

"Did they say that two persons were carried off?" asked Lucrezia, anxiously.

"Yes—two: Ciprina and the young man who was found with her."

"This is bewildering!" cried the Marchioness.

"Good heaven! what complication can have arisen? There has been some grand mistake, Ramorino!"

"A mistake?" he exclaimed. "Impossible! my *spirri* never make mistakes! They executed my order——"

"And that order?" demanded Lucrezia.

"It was to the effect agreed upon betwixt you and me, four nights back, at the villa: namely, to arrest the Signora Ciprina and any man who at the time might be found in her company."

"Ah! then some one else must have been arrested!" ejaculated the Marchioness; "for the right one has escaped!"

"Escaped! what do you mean?" cried the Minister of Police. "All this is most enigmatical to me! Tell me—has not that scoundrel whom you described—that cut-throat ruffian of a Frenchman—the escaped galley-slave, as you supposed him to be,—has not this Bourdon, in fine, been conveyed away from your house?"

"Not by your agents," rejoined Lucrezia. "He has left my house—it was yesterday morning—he treated me in the vilest manner! Ah! and what is more, he ransacked my desk—and I am very much mistaken if he did not take thence the note which you had written me!"

"What note?" demanded the Minister quickly.

"The note to which you yourself just now referred—the one wherein you told me that Ciprina and her paramour had been arrested."

"But I sent that note to you at the villa!" ejaculated Ramorino.

"True!" returned the Marchioness. "I hastily threw it into my writing-desk: that writing-desk accompanied me on my immediate return to the town-mansion yesterday morning—it was in my boudoir—it was rifled by the villain Marcellin——"

"Marcellin?" echoed the Minister, with a start of surprise. "What on earth do you mean?"

In the wild agitation of her thoughts the Marchioness had left out that name; she could not now recall it: she trembled all over from head to foot—and she faltered out, "Yes—it was Marcellin after all!"

"Marcellin?" said Ramorino,—"a polished gentleman! and you took him for a galley-slave! Was he not once intimate at your house? Why did you call him Bourdon?"

"I had not seen him—he was secreted in Ciprina's chamber—he passed by the name of Bourdon——"

"Oh! but I recollect that when I asked you for a personal description, you said you had seen so

little of him. But if even for a single instant you had set eyes upon him, you ~~would~~ have known that his name was not Bourdon, but that it was your former acquaintance Edgar Marcellin!"

"It is useless to waste precious time," said Lucrezia: "I will explain everything on another occasion. This Marcellin must be arrested—you must scatter your agents all over Florence to ferret him out—no time is to be lost!"

"By Jupiter! I cannot understand it!" exclaimed Ramorino, who saw full well that there was something behind the veil which the Marchioness was drawing over her real motives.

"What do you mean?"

"Marcellin has got the note which you sent to me!" she cried vehemently.

"Well, this is awkward—yes, awkward enough," said Ramorino. "I wish it were otherwise. But we must meet the evil."

"How meet it?" demanded Lucrezia. "What! will you suffer Marcellin to make use of that note? Will you permit him to display your signature to so compromising a document? And then too, he has taken away other articles from my house!—he is a thief and a robber!"

"A thief and a robber?" said Ramorino, who had the most perfect recollection of Edgar Marcellin when he had met him in fashionable society about a twelvemonth back.

"Yea—a most dangerous character!" exclaimed the Marchioness.

"Ah! a dangerous character?" repeated Ramorino, as suspicion was growing stronger and stronger in his mind. "How is it, my dear Lucrezia, that you are so constantly annoyed by these dangerous characters? The other day it was the Neapolitan exile, Paoli——"

"Yea, yea!"—and the Marchioness quivered visibly from head to foot.

"Signor Paoli," repeated the Minister, fixing his dark eyes keenly upon the Marchioness. "And now it is Edgar Marcellin! Truly, you are most unfortunate! But you are not telling me everything, Lucrezia!—you do not place it in my power to assist you thoroughly and completely!"

"What more would you have me tell you?" cried the Marchioness. "For your own sake, as well as for mine, you must send and arrest this Edgar Marcellin! Let the same orders be issued in reference to him as those which you gave with respect to Ciprina and——"

"What particular orders do you mean?" asked Ramorino.

"That Marcellin is not to be permitted to give utterance to a word. Oh, you yourself said that there were gags for tongues as well as chains for limbs!"

"Yea—I remember," interrupted Ramorino: and at the same instant his countenance assumed a certain decisiveness of expression, as if he had all in a moment resolved to adopt some particular course. "Now, my dear Lucrezia, indeed you are most sweetly beautiful! Take off this invidious bonnet which shades your lovely countenance—this shawl which half conceals your superb form!"

The Marchioness bent upon Ramorino all the power of her regards, as she flattered herself that the fascinating influence of her charms was paramount with the Minister. She threw off her

bonnet and her splendid Cechemere shawl: she sat down by his side and caressed him.

"Everything shall be done according to your wishes, my sweet Lucrezia," said Ramorino, passing his arm round her waist; "and every nook and corner in Florence shall be presently ferreted by my *shirri* in search of this Frenchman who is so obnoxious to you. But let us speak for a few minutes upon a more tender subject—and then I will issue the requisite mandates."

"Ah! my dear Ramorino," said the Marchioness, "you are full of kindness towards me! I forgot to add that Marcellin has enticed away a groom of mine—Bernardo by name——"

"And is he obnoxious likewise, my dear Lucrezia?" inquired the Minister of Police.

"Of course, if I had the power," rejoined the Marchioness, "I would punish him—I would let him follow his new master to the same dungeon whither that master is soon to be consigned."

"You shall give me a proscription-list," interjected Ramorino, "and all your enemies shall be cleared away from your path."

Lucrezia lavished caresses upon the Count, as she murmured, "Oh, the delights of enjoying power!"

"A similar observation came from your lips the other night, at your villa," said Ramorino; "and my answer was that you might consider whatsoever power I possessed to be your own likewise. And it is so, Lucrezia!" he continued. "But I was about to speak on a very tender topic. You are beautiful—and I love you. Indeed I love you so much that henceforth I shall be madly jealous at the idea of any one else——"

"Oh! I will be wholly and solely thine!" murmured the Marchioness, lavishing fresh endearments upon her companion.

"Ah! say you so?" ejaculated the Count. "Oh! can I believe you?"

"On my soul, as a living woman!" rejoined the Marchioness. "What proof could I give you? Tell me, what proof?"

"What proof? This fair hand!" answered the Count—and he pressed that hand to his lips.

"You are not serious!" said Lucrezia, with a momentary start. "No! no! you are not!" she added, with a smile. "Of what avail were it to impose upon ourselves useless shackles?"

"Ah, then," cried Ramorino, "you already regret your solemn vow that you will be mine wholly and solely!"

"I neither regret the vow," responded the Marchioness; "nor will I break it. I will be your mistress—Yes, your mistress—faithful, true, and constant!—but I will not become your wife."

"You therefore refuse," said Ramorino, "to give me the proof of love which I demand?"

"The proof itself is useless," replied Lucrezia, who grew more and more frightened at the turn the conversation was taking; for, as the reader has been before informed, she held the idea of matrimony in abhorrence.

"No—the proof is not useless," continued the Minister of Police. "I will not accept you as a mistress, Lucrezia. Be my wife—or else be to me as nothing! Let us not waste time in arguing the point. Besides, if you studied your own in-

terests you would comprehend that a man will do more for his wife than he would for his mistress. If a mistress become endangered or dishonoured, he can cast her off: but the danger and dishonour of a wife affect the husband! Her interests are his interests: there is an identity of position, so to speak!"

"What mean you?" asked Lucrezia, gazing with a species of affright and bewilderment on Ramorino; for she thought that there was something covertly significant in his language.

"I mean," he replied, fixing his regards steadfastly upon her, "that if you well studied your own interests, you would rejoice to have the Minister of Police as your husband. Ah, Lucrezia! let us not dissemble any longer! I have penetrated your secret. Become my wife—and I will protect and shield and defend you, with all those means so powerful and so comprehensive, so insidious and so subtle, which enable me to prove the most valuable of friends or the most dangerous of enemies!"

The Marchioness of Mirano sat gazing upon the Minister of Police with horror and consternation in her looks. Whispers relative to his pecuniary embarrassments had reached her ears; and she saw in a moment that if she gave him her hand in marriage, she would at the same instant be making him the master of her entire fortune.

"You understand me, Lucrezia?" he said. "Is there any need for me to speak out more plainly?"

"No, Ramorino—no!" she ejaculated. "I will be your mistress—I will *not* be your wife! I will love you—I will prove your sincerest friend—I will display my gratitude!"

"Useless words, Lucrezia!" exclaimed the Count vehemently. "You shall become my wife within twelve hours; or else——"

"Or else what?" she demanded, starting up and gazing with the most feverish anxiety upon him; for she now determined to know the worst.

"Or else," he answered, in a stern implacable tone, "I abandon you to your fate—and you will be arrested as the murderess of the young page Giulio!"

A fearful moan came forth from the lips of the miserable Lucrezia, as she staggered back and would have fallen if she had not suddenly supported herself against a piece of furniture. Indescribable horror was in her looks; and Ramorino felt that the triumph was his own. But it was only for a single instant that he betrayed this sense of success: it was no subject for him to gloat malignantly upon—nor had he any desire to prolong the mental tortures of the miserable Marchioness. And on Lucrezia's own part, a rapid revulsion of feeling took place. She mentally ejaculated, "It is only a random arrow which he has shot!"—and then advancing towards the Minister, she said with cold haughty dignity, "You are falsely accusing me—and you know it! But you have rendered me too many services to permit my indignation to flame up against you. Therefore I forgive you for the cruel injury involved in such a suspicion."

The Minister of Police was too much accustomed, by the very nature of his office, to read deeply into the human heart, to be deceived by

the assumption of a demeanour which would have staggered any other person. He therefore only shook his head, in the hope that Lucrezia would retreat from a defence-work which she ought to feel to be utterly untenable. But she mistook Ramorino's meaning: she thought that he was indeed staggered—and she hastened to follow up the advantage which she fancied herself to have gained.

"You have touched upon a tender subject towards me, my dear Ramorino," she said; "and you will now permit me in my turn to approach one which is delicate in reference to yourself. I love you—and I am grateful for your kindness. It would please me well to be enabled to afford you a proof alike of my love and my gratitude. Come! why should there be any want of confidence between us? Rumour has wasted to my ears the fact that you have been a little extravagant—it happens that I have at my banker's a considerable sum for which I have no immediate use—I beseech you to take it——"

"Lucrezia," interrupted the Minister of Police, "there ought indeed to be no want of confidence between us! You have indignantly denied the accusation which I threw out; and I am bound to receive such an assurance from the lips of a lady."

There was a scarcely perceptible sneer on the Minister's lips for a moment. Slight though it were, Lucrezia perceived it—for all her senses and faculties had now a horrible clearness and keenness; and she trembled.

"But just suppose, for argument's sake," continued Ramorino, "that other voices proclaimed the same charge—that other tongues sent forth the same accusation!—what course could I pursue? There are certain cases in which even those who are the most highly placed, dare not trifle with justice——"

"Oh!" interrupted Lucrezia, bitterly, "there is a repetition of the cruel accusation beneath all the cold composure of this language of yours! What do you mean? Tell me once for all—will you succour me? or rather I should say, will you do all that I just now asked for both our sakes?"

"Lucrezia," interrupted the Count; "let this farce have an ending! Be my wife—or resign yourself to the doom of a murderess!"

"What! again?" shrieked forth the wretched woman: "again this terrible accusation—this fearful threat?"

"Yes—again and again!" ejaculated Ramorino. "Listen! Why was Paoli obnoxious to you? Because he was Giulio's father. Why has Marcellin become obnoxious to you? Because he can most probably reveal something which you would fain stifle in his throat. Why did Ciprina become obnoxious to you? Because, as I now gather from the different things you have told me, she was Marcellin's paramour—in his secrets—and doubtless sympathizing with him. And why did you deceive me in reference to Marcellin? Why tell me his name was Bourdon? Why refuse a personal description of him? Because you were afraid of affording me a clue—of exciting suspicion—of making me think that certain things appeared strange, and thereby setting my reflections in a particular train! Yes—it is all apparent now!"

The Marchioness had sunk upon the sofa: she moaned—she writhed convulsively—but she spoke not a word.

"Do you know, Lucrezia, that the other night—at your villa," continued the Minister of Police, "there was for an instant a suspicion flashing across my mind? It was when you were reclining in my arms, and we were conversing on the means of information possessed by the officials of my department. It was quite in an accidental manner that I alluded to the assassination of your page Giulio; then it struck me that the mention of the fact produced upon you an impression which it need not do! But a moment afterwards I banished the subject from my mind; for the truth is, I was under the fascination of your charms—the fumes of wine were likewise in my brain—and since that night I have had other things to engage my attention. But now——"

"Oh, spare me—and save me!" cried the Marchioness, springing towards Ramorino—throwing herself upon her knees—and seizing his hand in her own.

"Enough, Lucrezia! enough!" said the Minister of Police. "I did not wish to torture your feelings; and as for your personal safety, I will ensure it! Consent to become my wife—and I will banish or imprison half Florence rather than that a single hair of your head shall be injured!"

The struggle had been great in Lucrezia's mind: but it was now over. That struggle was between her love of independence and the control of her own fortune on the one hand—and, on the other, a dread of the shackles and casualties of a married state. But she saw that fearful risks environed her: she saw likewise that she was utterly in the power of an unprincipled and unscrupulous man. She therefore prepared to make any sacrifice, however great, rather than peril her life.

"Yes—it shall be as you say," she murmured. "I will accompany you to the altar. You will shield and protect me, Ramorino—you will ensure my safety——"

"I have already said it: I now swear it! Our nuptials shall be private. To-morrow morning shall behold our union—Pity 'tis that we cannot join our hands within the hour that is passing!"

"What! in such haste?" cried the Marchioness. "Ah! do you mistrust me?—do you think that I shall fly from my word?"

"No," rejoined Ramorino: "you will not do that! You see, my dear Lucrezia, that you are safe in becoming my wife: for in all Tuscany I alone can protect you under existing circumstances."

"And now, therefore, lose no time," urged Lucrezia, "in scattering your *sbirri* throughout Florence! Let Marcellin be arrested—and Bernardo—and Antonia——"

"Hush!" said the Minister: "some one is approaching the door!"

A footman entered, saying, "Please your Excellency, your presence is required for a few moments."

"I will return immediately, dearest Lucrezia," whispered Ramorino to the Marchioness. "Remain here—and fear nothing. Ah, by the bye! before I come back to you, I will issue the requisite mandates for the arrest of those persons whom you have named."

The Minister of Police issued from the apartment; and in the passage outside, he said to the servant, "Who is it that is waiting to see me?"

"A priest, my lord," was the response.

"A priest?" ejaculated Ramorino, struck with the singularity of the coincidence; and he muttered to himself, "This is remarkable! The very thing that I could have most desired!—for the sooner I obtain indisputable power over Lucrezia's wealth, the better for my own interests will it be! And by Jupiter! within the hour that is passing shall the nuptial knot be tied!—Where is this priest?" he demanded.

"I left him in the ante-room of your Excellency's cabinet," answered the footman.

"Good!" said the Minister: and thither he at once proceeded.

On entering the cabinet, Count Ramorino beheld a pale, interesting, handsome young man—clad in the priestly garb—and whose looks were somewhat fatigued and jaded. He rose from his seat as the Minister entered, and made a courteous bow.

"Whom have I the pleasure of receiving?" asked Ramorino, somewhat impatiently; for his mind was intent upon having the nuptial benediction pronounced with the least possible delay.

"My name is Falconara, my lord," answered the young priest; "and I am one of the military chaplains in the service of his Highness the Grand Duke."

"Tis well, holy father!" said Ramorino. "We will perhaps endeavour to find you a still better office."

"If at the outset of my mission to your lordship," said Falconara, "I have found favour in your sight, it will indeed be most cheering to my heart."

"Ah!" thought the Count; "he comes to ask a favour either for himself or somebody else!—Holy father!" he continued, now speaking audibly; "tranquillize yourself upon that particular point. You shall have what you require. You have arrived most opportunely: I was on the very point of sending to fetch some minister of the gospel hither—and you make your appearance!"

"Ah, my lord!" cried Falconara, rejoiced at the manner in which his previously dreaded interview with the Minister was progressing; "then my presence here is most opportune! May I ask whether it be to shrive a dying one——"

"No," replied Ramorino; "but to marry two living and loving ones."

"If there be urgency," said the priest, with a deferential bow, "I will perform the ceremony."

"Yes—there is urgency," answered the Minister; "for the bridegroom is too much occupied by affairs of state to bestow any leisure on marriage-festivals and rejoicings: he has therefore agreed with his intended bride that the nuptials are to be solemnized with as much privacy as possible. The lady herself—high-born, beautiful, and rich—wishes to avoid the gaping curiosity which pompous and ostentatious weddings always excite. In short, holy father, we are agreed——"

"Yow, my lord?" ejaculated the priest with surprise.

"Yes—I," rejoined the Count. "And the lady is the Marchioness di Mirano. Come with me."

holy father: the ceremony shall take place at once."

The priest bowed, and followed the Count of Ramorino from the apartment. The reader can easily understand how Father Falconara was deeply anxious to shield the Governor of Bagno against the ire of the Minister of Police on account of the escape of the prisoners: because the young priest himself had aided one of those captives to regain the fresh air of freedom. It would have weighed upon Falconara's conscience as a huge crime, if Captain Belluno should suffer on that account. Thus, when Falconara found that instead of having to deal with a stern functionary who had to be coaxed and cajoled, entreated and implored, he was treated with the utmost favour and friendliness, his heart leapt within him. The sort of marriage which he was called upon to solemnize, was perfectly legal, and not altogether unusual; so that there was not the slightest scruple of conscience on the part of Father Falconara in acceding to Ramorino's request.

"It will be time enough," thought the young priest, "to explain the object of my mission, and communicate the evil tidings to the Minister, when I shall have rendered him the service he has demanded. The pardon of Captain Belluno is the fee that I shall demand!"

The Minister of Police led Father Falconara into the apartment where the Marchioness di Mirano had remained. He deemed it better not to enter beforehand to prepare her for the ceremony, as he did not wish to stand a chance of being compelled to argue the whole question over again: he thought that by acting thus promptly and abruptly, he should be striking a blow which would convince Lucrezia of his resolute firmness, and therefore prove irresistible on her part.

The instant the door opened, the Marchioness flung her looks anxiously towards it; for her mind was in so perturbed, anxious, and unsettled a state, that the slightest incident was now felt well calculated to be fraught with terror. She beheld Ramorino—and she beheld also the priest following him. She started—and a flush of indignation glowed for an instant upon her cheeks: but she immediately resigned herself to her fate.

"Dearest Lucrezia," Ramorino hastened to whisper in her ear, "the opportune arrival of this young ecclesiastic, who has come to ask me some favour——"

"Enough, my lord!" returned the Marchioness. "As well now as to-morrow!"

"Permit me, holy father," said the Minister of Police, with an air of the most perfect courtesy, "to present you to the Marchioness di Mirano."

The young priest bowed: Lucrezia bestowed upon him a cold and distant salutation—for in the morbid state of her mind she almost regarded him as an enemy.

"A white cloth if you please, my lord," whispered Father Falconara.

A snowy napkin was instantaneously procured from an adjoining room, without the necessity of summoning a domestic; and the young priest spread the cloth upon the table to make it represent an altar. Then the ceremony commenced. The Minister of Police and the Marchioness di Mirano knelt together; and Father Falconara, taking a missal from beneath his essock, read the

proper service in a low but impressive tone. We need not dwell upon the proceeding: suffice it to say that the wish previously entertained by the Count of Ramorino, was gratified: and within the hour then passing the Marchioness became his wife. No legal intervention had given security to her fortune—no marriage-settlement had invested her with the exclusive control of her great wealth: but all was now at the mercy of a gambler and a spendthrift. This she knew: but, on the other hand, it was her very life which had been at stake—and now she experienced a sudden sense of security, such as for some time past she had not known!

They rose from their knees—that couple—man and wife!—and Father Falconara breathed a few words of congratulation; but they fell tamely and languidly from his lips, for he could not blind himself to the fact that there was something strange and peculiar in this wedding.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OMINOUS APPEARANCES.

Yes—it was no wonder that the young priest should think there was something strange in the bridal which he had just consecrated: for though, as we have already said, there was nothing illegal in it, nor was such a wedding altogether unusual, yet it naturally struck Father Falconara that a nobleman and a lady belonging to the highest class of society might well have spared a little time to have their espousals celebrated in a manner more consistent with their rank.

As the priest closed his missal, the Count of Ramorino imprinted a kiss upon the forehead of Lucrezia, who received it with simulated tenderness: for though she looked upon the Minister as the man who was to save and defend her, yet she detested him in the light of a husband who had forced himself upon her.

Father Falconara took a seat at a side-table, where there were writing materials; and drew up the usual certificate of the marriage. This was speedily accomplished; and he handed the document to the Count of Ramorino, who at once secured it about his person. Then, drawing forth two or three pieces of gold, Ramorino approached Father Falconara, and hurriedly whispered, "Come to me to-morrow—and I will fulfil my promise, if possible. You have come here to ask—and if it is reasonable, it shall be granted."

The young priest received not the gold which the Minister endeavoured to thrust into his hand; and he said, "Pardon me, my lord—but I cannot accept such a fee; and the boon which I have to entreat of you, is one that can be granted by means of a single word from your lips."

"What mean you? But to-morrow let it be!" said the Count. "At present——"

"Not two minutes shall I detain your lordship!" interrupted Father Falconara: "and believe me, my mission is an important one."

"Well, well," said Ramorino, impatiently, "proceed. What is your business? Whence do you come?"

"I am the chaplain, may it please your Excel-

lency," continued the priest, "at the Castle of Bagno in the Apennines."

The Marchioness di Mirano, who after the marriage-ceremony had thrown herself upon a seat in a corner of the room, indifferent to what was passing betwixt her husband and the priest, now gave a sudden start; for she knew that it was to the Apennine fortress just named that Ciprina and her companion (whoever he were) had been conveyed. Ramorino himself now seemed inspired with a sudden interest in the discourse; and he said, "Ah! you are the chaplain at Bagno? What tidings have you for me?"

"The boon that I would crave at the hands of your Excellency," proceeded Falconara, "is your pardon on behalf of the Governor Captain Belluno, on account of the escape of two prisoners."

The Marchioness shivered from head to foot; for she was at once smitten with a presentiment which made her think within herself, "Everything will yet go wrong! Heaven is warring against me!"

"The escape of two prisoners?" cried Ramorino. "But who?"

"Numbers Twenty-nine and Thirty," answered the young priest.

"But their names? their names?" cried Lucrezia, springing forward; for she was unable to restrain her feverish impatience a moment longer.

"Hush, dearest!" said the Minister, thus hastily speaking aside to his wife: "no names are known at the Castle of Bagno! Holy father," he continued, turning again towards the priest, "perhaps you have brought some written report from his Excellency Captain Belluno?"

"No, my lord," returned Falconara: "Captain Belluno considered the matter to be so grave that he begged me to become the bearer of verbal explanations. I therefore set out at once from Bagno: it was at four o'clock in the afternoon—and immediately on my arrival in Florence, I waited on your Excellency."

"But these prisoners," exclaimed Ramorino,—"who are they? Not those who were so recently consigned to Bagno?"

"Yes, my lord—those who arrived at Bagno at a very early hour yesterday morning."

"A young lady—very beautiful—tall—with dark hair and eyes?" ejaculated Lucrezia, almost wild with the fears that were racking her: "about nineteen years of age—elegantly formed—"

"The young lady," replied Father Falconara, meekly and diffidently, "certainly possesses a large share of what the world calls beauty; and her description corresponds with that which your ladyship has just given."

"Then my enemy has escaped!" almost shrieked forth the wretched Lucrezia, forgetting in her mental agony that she might betray something in the presence of the priest, or that at all events he would think this excitement on her part very strange.

"For heaven's sake compose yourself!" said Ramorino, again turning aside towards Lucrezia. "What must this young man think?" he demanded, with petulant, and almost with savage accents.

"True! true!" murmured Lucrezia: and then in a voice which was scarcely audible, she said,

"After a moment's lull the storm gathers more fearfully around me than ever."

"Oh, my lord! and you also my lady!" exclaimed Father Falconara, terrified at the turn which the proceedings appeared to be taking, though everything was so unaccountable to him; "I beseech you to believe me—on the sacred word of an ecclesiastic—the Governor of the fortress of Bagno is faultless in respect to the escape of these persons!"

"Good heavens! what will be the result?" murmured Lucrezia, heedless of what the priest was now saying.

"Have courage!" hastily responded Ramorino, drawing his wife still further aside: "you will only make matters worse by giving way to this wild excitement! There!—sit down—be quiet, I beseech you! Be silent!—and let me question this priest."

Lucrezia sank upon the seat to which her husband conducted her: and the Count again turned towards Father Falconara.

"The young lady has escaped, you say? When did this happen?" he demanded.

"At about two o'clock in the afternoon of this day," replied the priest; "and by some means so mysterious that they utterly defy all conjecture."

"Then she has already had time to arrive in Florence, if such be her purpose!" thought Lucrezia to herself:—and the same reflection simultaneously occurred to her husband.

"And the other prisoner?" asked Ramorino quickly.

"The one who arrived with the young lady," returned the priest. "It was last evening—at about this same hour," he continued, glancing at a time-piece which stood upon the mantel, "that the young gentleman escaped. The means which he adopted are neither mysterious nor unknown: but in this case, as in the other, Captain Belluno was utterly devoid of all blame."

"Well, well," ejaculated Ramorino hastily, "we will hold the Governor acquitted of any fault in connexion with these misadventures."

"A thousand thanks, my lord!" exclaimed Falconara: "this is the most liberal and bounteous fee your Excellency could possibly bestow upon me for the ceremony which I have had the honour of solemnising!"

"But that young gentleman? for you said that he is a young one, I believe?"

"Yes—his age cannot exceed twenty," replied the priest.

"A mere stripling!" ejaculated the Minister. "But his personal description?"

"Rather tall of stature—of slender figure—very genteel in his bearing and manners—I should also say that the world would consider him remarkably handsome."

"Proceed," said Ramorino: "there are yet more particular details which you may give. His hair?"

"Dark hair, clustering in natural curls," continued the priest. "His eyes also dark—large, and clear; and I am bound in truthfulness to add, that manly frankness, a lofty spirit, a generous disposition, as well as a certain firmness of character, are all indicated in the expression of his countenance."

"Of course you are ignorant of his name?" said Ramorino, inquiringly.

Father Falconara remained silent.

"You have evidently seen him," continued the Minister: "perhaps you have conversed with him?"

"It is my duty, my lord, to visit all prisoners with the least possible delay."

"And therefore you visited this one of whom we are speaking? and you conversed with him? Could you not judge from his accents to what country he belongs? Is he an Italian or a Frenchman?"

"He is an Englishman," rejoined the priest. "But beyond this, my lord——"

"Oh, of course!" ejaculated Ramorino; "I am well aware that the rules of those fortresses are most stringent, and that prisoners are not allowed to speak of any affairs beyond a certain sphere." Then hastening to the spot where Lucrezia was seated, he whispered, "You have heard that description. Do you happen to know the individual?"

"No—I do not recollect any young Englishman of that age or description visiting at my house. But Ciprina herself is of English extraction, you know—she may have fallen in with a lover or a relative—she may have met him in her apartment at the moment when the irruption of the *sbirri* took place——"

"Yes—it must have been so!" said Ramorino. "This is the only possible way of accounting for the capture and carrying-off of that unknown young man along with Ciprina! But if he be really English, the affair is somewhat awkward. These Englishmen are terribly independent—they never brook an insult or an injury in a foreign country: they at once appeal to their ambassadors——"

"Oh, that difficulty is nothing in comparison with all the rest!" ejaculated Lucrezia, but still speaking in a voice that was inaudible to Father Falconara. "For heaven's sake take immediate measures!—let Marcellin be arrested!—let Ciprina be recaptured, if she have dared to return to Florence!"

"Trust to me," said Ramorino: "the grass shall not grow under my feet!—Holy father, you may retire; but the pledge which I have given you shall be fulfilled. Come to me to-morrow, in the afternoon; and I will give you a letter that shall be perfectly satisfactory to the Governor of Bagno."

Father Falconara took his departure from the private residence of the Minister of Police; and as he issued forth, nine o'clock was being proclaimed from the church towers of Florence.

"I will lose not an instant, dear Lucrezia," said the Count of Ramorino, so soon as he and his bride were left alone together, "in putting everything in a proper train for the purpose of ensuring your complete safety and crushing your enemies. Remain you here, dearest! I shall return as speedily as possible."

The Minister imparted another kiss upon the brow of his bride; and he then quitted the room. Almost immediately afterwards he left the house, and proceeded towards the Office of the Police. On arriving there, he commanded the principal *sbirro* to whom he had entrusted the expedition to the Mirano mansion, to be summoned to his presence. This officer, on his return from Bagno,

had simply reported to his master that the two prisoners had been duly consigned to that fortress: he had said nothing in respect to their escapees from the postchaise during the journey into the Apennines: he was afraid of being accused of cowardice or want of vigilance. Neither did he now make any allusion to those matters. The Minister questioned him minutely with regard to the young gentleman who had been carried off along with the young lady. The *sbirro* repeated the personal description already given by Father Falconara,—adding, "If there be anything wrong, my lord, you know that I fully obeyed the orders which were given me."

"There is no blame to be attached to you. But tell me—have you any idea who this young gentleman can be? for he was carried off by mistake!"

"It is strange, my lord," ejaculated the *sbirro*, "but from something I heard upon the road, I really fancied there might be an error. Yet it was not for me to act upon any such assumption: I was obeying the mandates I had received direct from your Excellency."

"But what was it that you heard upon the road?" demanded Ramorino.

"That the young gentleman proclaimed himself to be English—that his name is De Vere—and that he is attached to the British Embassy at Naples."

"Ah!" cried Ramorino, as a thought now struck him. "I remember that the landlord of some hotel called here this morning, in very great trepidation; but my private secretary took down the notes of what he said."

The Minister hastened to open a memorandum-book which lay upon the table; and after running his eye over the contents of two or three pages, he suddenly ejaculated, "Ah! there it is! Yes—this is the entry! 'De Vere—an Englishman—about twenty years of age—tall—dark-haired—attached to the Neapolitan Embassy: arrived at the hotel at seven o'clock in the evening of November 1st. Dined, and went out at about eight or nine o'clock: has not been heard of since.'—Then 'tis the same!" cried the Minister: "and here is a pretty embarrassment—for he has escaped from Bagno!—and the lady has escaped also!"

Ramorino paced three or four times to and fro in his private cabinet where this conversation was taking place: but suddenly stopping short, he ejaculated, "Well, we must leave this affair to take its chance—or else I must see into it presently. But now take prompt and immediate measures to effect the arrest of these persons," continued Ramorino, handing to the police-agent a paper on which there was a tolerable amount of writing, divided into three distinct paragraphs. "Edgar Marcellin, a Frenchman—Bernardo, recently a groom in the service of the Marchioness of Mirano—and a girl whose Christian name is Antonia, also in the same service. The descriptions are there minutely given. Let them be arrested and gagged on the spot. If found together, let them be instantaneously separated—and let them be sent off in different conveyances and by different routes to the fortress of Barbarino. Let the Signora Ciprina also be searched for and recaptured!"

The Minister issued a few more instructions, which it is not however necessary to lay before



the reader: and the police-agent departed to execute the mandates which he had received.

"This young De Vere," said Ramorino to himself, the instant he was again alone, "will doubtless seek refuge in the British Embassy, if he shall have returned to Florence. I must investigate the matter!"

Ramorino enveloped himself in a cloak, and at once proceeded to the hotel where Charles had put up on his first arrival in Florence. He demanded to see the landlord in private: and he was speedily closeted with that individual.

"Have you heard anything relative to this missing young Englishman?" asked the Minister of Police.

"Nothing of him, my lord," was the answer. "But still something has occurred——"

"And what is that?" inquired the Minister quickly.

"A servant came this afternoon, between four and five o'clock——"

No. 70.—AGNES.

"A servant? From whence?"

"From the British Embassy, my lord."

"And between four and five o'clock? Well, proceed. What did the servant say?"

"The servant inquired if there were any letters for Mr. De Vere; because if so, he was to take charge of them."

"And were there any?" demanded the Count of Ramorino.

"Yes—one," responded the landlord. "It was left at the hotel yesterday."

"Who left it?" asked the Minister.

"I do not know, my lord. It was some common messenger or porter, who departed immediately afterwards. I gave the letter to the footman who came from the British Embassy; and he hurried away without saying another syllable, or without giving me the slightest information."

"And therefore you know nothing more?" exclaimed Ramorino.

"Nothing, my lord: but I should conclude that

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something must be known of the young gentleman at the British Embassy—and therefore I am no longer uneasy on his account.”

“If he should happen to return,” said the Minister, “lose not an instant in forwarding a message to me at the Prefecture to that effect.”

The Count then took his departure from the hotel; and he proceeded straight to the British Embassy. On announcing his name, he was at once conducted into a waiting-room, while his card was taken to the British Envoy. In a few minutes one of the *attachés* of the Embassy made his appearance; and courteously saluting the Tuscan Minister of Police, he said, “I regret that his Excellency”—thus alluding to the Envoy—“should be unable to receive your lordship at this moment: but he is exceedingly occupied—”

“It is unnecessary that his Excellency should disturb himself,” interjected Ramorino. “The object of my visit is so simple—and you can doubtless give me the information I seek. Intelligence has been communicated to the police that a young English gentleman, named Charles De Vere, has been unaccountably missing—”

“This information,” interrupted the *attaché*, “has also been forwarded to the Embassy.”

“Have any tidings been received—”

“I am really unable,” at once interrupted the *attaché*, “to give your lordship any information on the point: but I will presently report to his Excellency this kind visit on your lordship’s part, and I have no doubt that you will be communicated with as soon as there may be anything of consequence to impart.”

The Minister of Police failed not to perceive that the *attaché* was speaking evasively; but without suffering his countenance to betray the suspicion which he thus entertained, Ramorino said, “I just now called at the hotel where the young English gentleman had put up; I learnt that inquiries had been made from his letters on the part of a domestic from this Embassy.”

“Oh, yes,” said the *attaché*: “that is our rule. Whenever anything doubtful or mysterious happens to a British subject abroad, the first duty of the British diplomatic agent in the particular country, state, or district, is to look after the missing one’s property and letters.”

“No doubt of it,” said Ramorino: and perceiving that it was useless to endeavour to sift the *attaché* any further, he took his leave, with a request that should tidings be received concerning Mr. De Vere, they might be at once communicated to him.

“That fellow was playing a part!” said Ramorino to himself as he issued forth from the portals of the British Embassy. “There is a storm brewing!—that is perfectly clear! Doubtless this Ciprina has told De Vere everything that she herself knows or suspects; and De Vere purposes to range himself on the same side with Ciprina and Marcellin! Ah, and what if Marcellin should have also sought the protection of his own Embassy? To fight the battle against them, if they be backed by the power and influence of the two Embassies,—this will indeed prove a hard struggle! By Jupiter! it would be by no means amusing if in the very first days or even hours of my honeymoon, I found myself called upon to issue a warrant for the arrest of my own wife!”

While making these reflections, the Count of Ramorino pursued his way through the streets of Florence, muffled in his cloak. As he approached his private residence—where, he it remembered, he had left Lucrezia—he noticed a man, dressed in mean apparel, lounging about on the opposite side of the street. Now, a Minister of Police has the best memory and the keenest eyes in all the world for particular circumstances. Consequently, Ramorino instantaneously recollected that when he had just now issued forth from his private residence, he had seen a mean-looking person hanging about the premises;—and he now recognised the man to be the same.

“Ah! he!” thought the Minister to himself; “this is an espial of some kind! But we will see.”

Ramorino continued his way without entering his private residence; and he walked in the direction of the Mirano mansion. He lighted a cigar, and strolled along as if with the leisurely, nonchalant air of one who has nothing particular to do;—and on arriving in the vicinity of the palatial establishment, he flung his keen regards around. He now perceived another person in mean apparel, lounging about in this quarter; and he muttered to himself, “Ah! ’tis clear enough! The watch is set upon Lucrezia!”

Continuing his way, the Count of Ramorino dropped the cigar from his mouth at the very instant he was passing the man to whom we have alluded. This individual rushed forward to pick it up; and the Count exclaimed, “Thank you, my good man! thank you!—but it is of no consequence! However, here is something for your trouble.”

“I am obliged to your Excellency,” said the man, taking the coin which was proffered him; and he showed by his respectful demeanour, as well as by his words, that he had recognised the Minister of Police.

“Ah! you are not an Italian?” said Ramorino, as if quite carelessly.

“No, my lord,” was the response: “I am a Frenchman.”

“And a very civil person you are into the bargain,” rejoined the Count. “Good evening to you, my man.”

The Minister of Police continued his way, making a circuit of the walls bounding the gardens in the midst of which stood the Mirano mansion; and he said to himself, “A labourer, who has all the ready civility of a footman, and who bows like one! No, no! that will not do! Coarse apparel and clean hands! Inconsistent! I understand it all! It is as I suspected! Marcellin has taken refuge at the French Embassy—he has told his tale to the Ambassador—and Lucrezia is watched by two of the French footmen disguised as labourers! I will however assure myself more fully on the point.”

Having made the circuit of the grounds belonging to the Mirano mansion, the Minister of Police retraced his way towards his private residence; and by suddenly debouching, as it were, from a bye-street almost immediately facing his abode, he came upon the mean-looking individual to whom we at first alluded. He purposely ran against him, but making it appear as if it were entirely an accident. The man apologized on his own side: Ra-

morino answered courteously, and passed on. His aim was accomplished: he had discovered that this individual was also a Frenchman—that he was no labourer, though disguised in the garb of a working man—but that he had all the manners of a laquay.

"There is not the slightest shadow of a doubt!" said the Count to himself: "Lucrezia is watched! Ah! it is somewhat too strong that the abode of the Minister of Police should be placed under espial! Marcellin must be at the bottom of it!—and some decisive blow ought at once to be struck! But what? or how?"

This was the bewildering question: for Ramorino knew very well that it was a difficult and a dangerous thing to have to deal with the Embassies of powerful Governments when protecting the subjects of their own nations.

"What is to be done?" he again asked himself. "Ah! I will confer with Lucrezia for a few minutes, and ascertain the precise details of the fearful position in which she stands! Everything is not as yet known to me—and in the absence of this knowledge I am unable to devise those schemes that may be for the best."

The Minister of Police accordingly entered his private abode; and he was about to ascend the staircase in order to return to the apartment where he had left Lucrezia, when a domestic, accosting him, said, "If you please, my lord, his Excellency the Minister of Finance called a few minutes ago."

"Ah! the Minister of Finance!" ejaculated Ramorino—and for an instant a cold shudder passed over him: but the next moment regaining his self-possession, he mentally said, "No matter! Thank heaven, I shall be enabled to realize tomorrow the funds which will save me, and which will likewise place me in a position to defy my mortal enemy—my colleague, and yet my rival in the Cabinet!"

"His Excellency is waiting," said the laquay.

"Waiting?" echoed Ramorino. "You mean that the Minister of Finance——"

"Is waiting, my lord. His Excellency said that it was of importance he should see your lordship."

The Count of Ramorino experienced another sudden access of alarm: but again he quickly recovered his self-possession as he reflected that it was barely possible for the Finance Minister to drive him completely to extremities at that unreasonable hour in the evening.

Ramorino proceeded to the apartment where the Minister of Finance was waiting to see him. The financier was a little, thin, pale-faced, elderly man—with pointed features, sharp restless grey eyes, and very thin lips, which he was in the constant habit of compressing in a manner that indicated the firm resoluteness of his character. He was a strictly honest man—and he was likewise a moral man: he had his suspicions of Ramorino's integrity—while he was convinced of his profligacy. For these reasons he hated Ramorino; and being naturally malignant, spiteful, and vindictive, he had for some time past been watching for an opportunity to bring about the downfall of the Minister of Police.

Count Ramorino entered the apartment where his antagonist was awaiting his presence. There

always existed a great coolness between them: thus there was now no shaking of hands—merely the salutations of a distant courtesy; and Ramorino, with an air of the most perfect self-possession, asked, "To what am I to attribute the honour of the present visit?"

"To a subject of importance," replied the Minister of Finance; "or else I should not intrude upon your Excellency at this unreasonable hour."

"And that subject, my lord," said Ramorino,—"what may it be?"—though he had little difficulty in forming a conjecture upon the point.

"Four days ago, my lord," said the Minister of Finance, fixing his small grey eyes steadfastly and searchingly upon Ramorino, "you drew upon the Treasury a cheque for the monthly sum required for the service of your department."

"Yes, my lord," replied Ramorino. "I am usually punctual in drawing on the last day of every month."

"And the Treasury is as punctual in honouring your drafts, my lord," interjected the Minister of Finance.

"No doubt," said Ramorino. "Whatever misunderstandings there may have been betwixt your lordship and myself on various subjects, I have never failed to comprehend, as well as to proclaim to all the world, that your lordship's exactitude and punctuality in the affairs of your department render you a model for the contemplation of all financiers."

The Minister of Finance understood that this was flattery's sop thrown out for a purpose; and he smiled scornfully and contemptuously—for he was about the last person in existence to be wheedled or cajoled in any such manner. The smile almost instantaneously passed away from his lips; and he said with his wonted glacial severity, "On the morning of the 31st of October your lordship's draft was honoured at the Treasury; but this is the evening of the 3rd of November, and no portion of that sum has yet been devoted to its proper purpose."

"I might as a colleague, standing on equal terms with yourself," answered Ramorino, assuming an air of dignity, "decline to suffer myself to be questioned on the point——"

"Do so if you think fit," interrupted the Minister of Finance, with a spiteful expression of countenance; "and I will at once address myself to the Prime Minister, to whom your Excellency will not be enabled to refuse an explanation."

"I have not refused you an explanation, my lord," responded the Count. "On the contrary, I am treating you with a courtesy which if you do but say the word, shall expand into friendship. For wherefore should there be enmity between us? Are we not members of the same administration? are we not pledged to the same policy? are not our objects identical—namely, to serve our sovereign and the country?"

"Most assuredly, my lord," answered the Minister of Finance. "Believe me, therefore, that it is because I wish this administration of which we are members to be alike respectable and respected—because also I consider it my duty to watch vigilantly over every detail of my own department, even when its finances flow into the sphere of another department,—it is for all these reasons that I come to ask your Excellency why

the salaries of the *employés* in the Ministry of Police remain unpaid for the past month?"

"My financial secretary," answered Ramorino, "omitted to give me the usual list until this afternoon, when it was too late to pay the salaries; but it is my purpose to liquidate the amounts the first thing to-morrow morning."

The Minister of Finance listened with a cold patience while Ramorino was speaking; and then he said, "This is most extraordinary, my lord; for your financial secretary tells quite a different tale."

"Ah!" ejaculated Ramorino. "I know not what tale my financial secretary may tell; but I am confident your Excellency will not believe a subordinate in preference to me, his master."

"Oh, it is for your Excellency to settle a reckoning of this kind with the individual himself," rejoined the Minister of Finance. "All I know is that your financial secretary complained to me this very evening, that although he gave your Excellency the usual list of salaries on the 31st of October——"

"It is false, my lord!" cried Ramorino vehemently: "totally false!"

"Then doubtless your lordship," resumed the Minister of Finance, "will send at once to the financial secretary, and in my presence put him in possession of the funds requisite for the payment of the salaries?"

"What! at this hour?" exclaimed Ramorino. "It is close upon ten o'clock! You would not have me attend to business at such a time in the evening?"

"At any hour—at any time," responded the Minister of Finance, "when the honour of a man and of a statesman is to be vindicated."

Ramorino looked hard at his colleague, and said, "You are speaking, my lord, as if you actually suspected that I am capable of some deed to which I will not more particularly allude."

The Minister of Finance looked still more piercingly and scrutinisingly at the Minister of Police, and said, "You actually speak, my lord, as if you were unable to give a refutation to the charge laid by your financial secretary."

"Charge?" echoed Ramorino. "The term is a strange one, my lord!"

"Yet it does amount to a charge," responded the Minister of Finance; "for your secretary is prepared to repeat it to-morrow in the presence of the Prime Minister—and even in that of the Grand Duke himself, if necessary."

"This is simply preposterous!" ejaculated Ramorino, affecting to smile with contempt. "I tell you, my lord, that at nine o'clock to-morrow morning the salaries shall all be paid——"

"And I tell you, my lord," interrupted the Minister of Finance, with the strongest emphasis, "that unless you this night convince me that the sum you so recently drew from the Treasury is safe in your keeping, I shall deem it my duty to make a prompt report to the Prime Minister, and therein to embody such evidence as I have received from the lips of your financial secretary."

These were strong words for one minister to address unto another: but the financier saw that he was fully justified in so doing; and gradually, but surely and unerringly, had he been pushing

his colleague Ramorino into a corner. For if the Count were not guilty of the charge implied against him, would he not at once indignantly repel it, and convince his colleague that the accusation was an atrocious falsehood? would he not for his own honour's sake hasten to show that the money was safe in his keeping, and thus sustain the apology that the non-payment of the salaries arose from an unavoidable cause of delay?

"I tell you again, my lord," said Ramorino, whom it cost many painful efforts to support an external air of composure, "that everything shall be put straight to-morrow morning, when the clerks arrive at the Prefecture at nine o'clock. What more would you have?"

"I would fain see your private banking-book," rejoined the Minister of Finance; "or else I would see the sum itself in the strong box at the Prefecture."

"You shall see it, my lord," replied Ramorino, with a steady calmness of countenance. "I shall be engaged for an hour; but if you will have the goodness to meet me at eleven o'clock punctually, at the Prefecture of Police, I will convince your Excellency that your suspicions are most injurious—most insulting——"

"Enough, my lord!" interjected the Minister of Finance; "you cannot do more than give me the proof which you have promised—and I cannot do less under the circumstances than to demand it. You will see that I know how to offer an apology where I give offence. At eleven o'clock punctually I shall be at the Prefecture of Police."

The Minister of Finance bowed, and issued from the room, somewhat surprised at the result of the interview, for he had fancied that he should have seen the Count of Ramorino grovelling at his feet: but still he was by no means convinced that the promised proof would be afforded at the hour that was appointed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MONEY-LENDER.

THE moment the door closed behind the Minister of Finance, the Count of Ramorino knit his brows, ground his teeth, and clenched his fists with a sudden access of rage; and he ejaculated, "By heaven! circumstances seem to grow darker and darker—and threatening clouds to spring up on every side! But no time is to be lost! there are a myriad difficulties to be met and a thousand evils to be staved off this night! To-morrow, ruin or success!—destruction or security! Which alternative is it to be?"

He now hastened to the apartment where he had left Lucrezia; and he found her labouring under the utmost agitation and anxiety—for she had been wondering why he returned not. Minutes were now ages to the guilty woman; and in every circumstance, even the most trivial, she beheld the grisly phantom of danger rising up before her.

"What have you done?" she asked, rushing forward to meet her husband. "Does everything go on well?—are the arrests effected?"

"The necessary orders have been given," replied

Ramorino; "and they will doubtless be executed, if circumstances render it possible."

"Ah! is there any uncertainty on the point?" cried Lucrezia, with feverish impatience.

"I must tell you candidly," rejoined the Minister of Police, "that matters are becoming terribly complicated."

A sound something like a stifling shriek came from betwixt Lucrezia's lips; and her countenance presented such a tablet of ghastly thoughts, that it did really appear as if a scream were passing behind it.

"That young Englishman, who was carried off by mistake to Bagno, is a certain Charles de Vere—he is attached to the British Embassy at Naples—and I have every reason to suppose that he is now under the protection of the British Envoy in this city. Then, as for Edgar Marcellin, it is likewise beyond a doubt that he has sought refuge at the Embassy of his own government. But even this is not all! You are watched, Lucrezia——"

"Watched?" she ejaculated: "what mean you? Watched? By whom?"

"I am very much mistaken if you are not watched by two persons from the French Embassy—one posted opposite this house, and who therefore doubtless followed you hither—the other loitering in the neighbourhood of your own mansion——"

"But you will protect me?" cried Lucrezia, joining her hands in agonizing appeal: "you will protect me? Oh, tell me that you will protect me!"

"You know that I will protect you to the very utmost of my power," answered Ramorino. "In fact, Lucrezia, it is useless to mince matters—it is as useless for me to deceive you, as it has been impossible for you to deceive me! We are both rowing in the same boat—we must sink or swim together! We both stand upon the very verge of destruction—you on account of your crime, I on account of my pecuniary embarrassments!"

"Oh, save me! save us both!" exclaimed Lucrezia; "and take all my property for the purpose! Do what you will with it!—sell—mortgage——"

"Compose yourself—give not way to these passionate outbreaks," said Ramorino. "How much money did you tell me just now that you had in the hands of the banker?"

Lucrezia named the sum, which was considerable—but still not adequate to meet the pressing requirements of the Minister of Police.

"It is only half-sufficient," he ejaculated: "and then too, it is impossible to obtain possession of it to-night! I tell you what you must do, Lucrezia!—you must immediately sign a paper to the effect that there are no marriage-settlements between us—that all your property has consequently become mine by virtue of the matrimonial alliance just now solemnized between us——"

"Oh, I will do anything if you will but undertake to save me!" cried Lucrezia. "But, good God! how desperate does our position seem!—how fearful! how terrible!"

"Give not way to lamentations," interrupted the Minister of Police; "summon to your aid all your presence of mind—you need a cool head and a perfect command over yourself. Now then, Lucrezia, if your mind be sufficiently tranquillized,

tell me exactly to what extent you are compromised—precisely in what manner the evidences could be accumulated against you! Tell me what Marcellin can say—what De Vere can say—what Ciprino can say!—in short, put me in possession of every fact, that I may the better be enabled to determine what to do in the present emergency: for you have only a few minutes to give me the required narrative, and I shall have only a few moments to take my decision!"

Lucrezia accordingly told her husband everything: she omitted not a single detail—she revealed the entire particulars; for she saw that it was now a matter of life and death, and this was a position that was not to be made a child's game of.

"And thus," said Ramorino, "you in the first instance accused Edgar Marcellin of the crime—and he fled in consequence?"

"Yes: it was so," answered Lucrezia: "he fled from Florence abruptly on account of that accusation."

"And that was nearly a year ago," said Ramorino: "and now he has returned stealthily and secretly! Ah! a grand blow may be indeed struck! The French Embassy shall not protect him!—it is a warrant on a charge of murder that I will forthwith issue against him!"

"Oh, think you that we are strong enough to pursue such a course?" cried Lucrezia: "think you that on my evidence alone—for on my evidence only will it be!—you can bring him to the bar of a criminal tribunal?"

"Let us get him out of the way, Lucrezia," said the Minister of Police, "and we shall then at least have breathing time. Remain here—I may be an hour gone—but remain here, I conjure you, until my return!"

The Count of Ramorino—having made Lucrezia attach her name to a certain paper which he drew up—again hastened to his private residence. It was now about half-past ten o'clock; and he sped in the first instance to the Prefecture of Police, where he drew up a warrant for the arrest of Edgar Marcellin on the charge of murdering Giulio Paoli. This warrant he entrusted to one of his most expert and daring officers; and he then quitted the Prefecture, leaving instructions that when the Minister of Finance presently called, he was to be requested to wait a few minutes.

The Count of Ramorino, on issuing forth again from the Prefecture, plunged into an adjacent maze of narrow streets; and he quickly stopped at a gate where he rang the bell.

"Now if the old man be at home, well and good," said the Minister; "I shall be safe! But if he be absent, what in the name of heaven am I to do? There is no other person in Florence who keeps so large a sum of money at his immediate disposal, and on whom I could call at such an hour!"

The gate was opened by the porter; and the Minister of Police inquired if Signor Farlo were in his own abode? The reply was in the affirmative; and the Count's heart beat exultingly. He traversed a spacious court-yard surrounded by buildings: he entered a staircase at the further extremity—and he ascended to the second floor. There he knocked at a door; and in about a minute a chain inside was heard to fall—then two

bolts were drawn back—a key turned in the lock—and the door opened. A shrivelled old man, between sixty and seventy years of age, enveloped in a dressing-gown, and holding a candle in his hand, made his appearance. Ramorino, had previously worn his hat slouched and the collar of his cloak high up, so that he should not be recognised by the porter of the lodging-house; but he now revealed his countenance—and the old man immediately recognised him. Making a low bow, he asked, "What can I do for your Excellency?"

At the same time Furlo—for such was the old man's name—led the way into a small parlour, which might likewise be called an office, inasmuch as it contained a desk covered with account-books and papers, and had a certain business-like appearance. We should observe that Furlo did not exhibit any considerable degree of surprise on beholding Count Ramorino there at that hour; and thence we may infer that it was not the first time a visit had been paid by the Minister of Police to Signor Furlo's abode at ten minutes to eleven o'clock at night.

"Now, my worthy friend," said the Count, at once entering upon the business which had brought him thither, "I require a considerable sum of money this very minute. I know you have it in your strong box—and there shall be ample security given."

"And the amount, my lord?" inquired Furlo, who, as perhaps the reader has already suspected, was a money-lender in a considerable way of business.

Ramorino named the sum—at the mention of which the old man made a slight movement of the head, accompanied by a drawing-in of the lips, as much as to imply that it was a very large amount indeed.

"And you want it directly, my lord?" he asked, slowly and hesitatingly.

"Directly," rejoined Ramorino. "I tell you I want it this very minute! By eleven o'clock it must be forthcoming from my hands—"

"Ah, my lord! my lord!" said the old man, shaking his head in a half-familiar, half-deprecating manner: "the gaming-table—"

"No matter, Furlo!" interrupted the Count: "you have the money, and you will lend it. The security—"

"Is it personal, my lord?" inquired the old man quickly: "for if so, I would rather decline—"

"Silence, and hear me!" ejaculated the Count. "What think you of a charge, or mortgage, upon one of the most splendid mansions in all Florence, —a mansion filled with magnificent furniture, pictures, plate, and ornaments of every description, —standing in the midst of its own grounds—"

"I will take the security, my lord," exclaimed Furlo.

"I knew it. Here! give me one of your *hypothecque* papers—I mean one of those printed forms which you have. I will fill it up in a moment—and you can be counting out the money."

"Good, my lord!"—and the old man produced one of the printed forms for which the Minister of Police had asked.

Ramorino sat down, and in two minutes the blanks were filled up in the proper manner; for this was a provisional security, or valid draft of a

mortgage, allowed by the Tuscan law, and which merely required registration on the ensuing day in order to render it effective. If the document were redeemed within seven days, no further expense need accrue; but if the mortgage were to continue for a longer period, it would be requisite to have a fresh deed drawn up by a notary, and duly attested, at the end of those seven days.

While the Minister of Police was filling up the document, Signor Furlo was counting out the gold pieces from his iron strong box. He arranged them in little piles upon a side table; and as he deposited each fresh heap there, he gave a smile, a sigh, and then a smile again. His first smile was that of the miser who gloated over the precious yellow metal; the sigh was heaved at the idea of parting with it; and then the second smile appeared upon his lips as he thought of the large amount of interest that Ramorino would have to pay for the loan.

"There is the sum, my lord," he said. "I presume the rate of interest is according to the usual terms?"

"Yes—I have so filled up the mortgage-paper," answered Ramorino. "It will be a good night's work for you, old man—inasmuch as to-morrow the loan will be returned—aye, and therewith all the different sums I have at any time borrowed of you."

"Right glad am I, my lord," said Furlo, rubbing his skinny old hands and smiling with his toothless mouth, "to hear that your prospects are so good. I suppose it is some lucky turn at the gaming-table—or else one of those happy wind-falls which sometimes come to great Ministers of State—"

"I have no time for prattling, Furlo," interjected the Count. "By Jove! it is close on eleven o'clock! How time flies! Here! take the deed—give me the coin—"

"Ah! one moment, my lord!" cried the old miser: "I quite forgot to ask where the property is situated—though of course I can take your Excellency's assurance—"

"I have just married, Furlo, a lady of immense fortune," exclaimed the Minister. "Here is the certificate!—here also is a paper signed by her own hand, to the effect that no marriage settlements have passed—and consequently—"

"I understand, my lord," said Furlo; "you are consequently exercising the privileges of a husband having full power over his wife's property. I congratulate your Excellency—But Ah!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Ramorino; "why that ejaculation? why that sudden start?" "Lucrezia di Mirano!" cried the old man; "Lucrezia di Mirano!" he repeated, in a still louder tone, as he glanced his eyes over the mortgage document.

"Yes—that is the lady whom this very evening I have married," hastily interjected the Count. "She is immensely rich—"

"My lord," said Furlo, "I beg to decline this transaction;" and the next instant the piles of golden coin were all swept back into the iron safe.

"Decline it?" exclaimed the Count, astonished and enraged. "What mean you, old dotard? Is not the Mirano mansion security enough for ten times the amount which I seek to borrow?"

"Likely enough, my lord," rejoined Furlo, as

he locked up the safe and consigned the key to his pocket; "but I would much rather decline the transaction. I am sorry, my lord—but—but—"

"Speak! tell me your meaning!" cried Ramorino. "Speak! I adjuro—I command you!"—for he was utterly bewildered by the conduct of the old man.

"Do not press me, my lord," said Furlo. "You have married the lady—Well, of course it is your lordship's choice—Yes, indeed, I hope for your Excellency's sake—"

"Furlo, I beseech you to explain your meaning," said the Minister of Police. "I do not demand—I implore and entreat! Is not Lucrezia di Mirano rich?"

"No doubt of it, my lord," answered Furlo. "Yes—rich beyond all question—"

"And beautiful," continued the Count. "But beware!" he cried, stamping his foot with angry impatience: "what has beauty to do with a money-transaction like this?—or what concern has an old miser with female loveliness?"

"True, my lord—I have no concern with anything of the kind," stammered Furlo. "I hope your Excellency will excuse me if I say no more on the subject—"

"Ah! but more must be said!" ejaculated the Minister. "You must tell me, old man, wherefore you so suddenly declined the bargain which you had at first accepted,—and why you gave vent to an ejaculation when the name of a noble lady was mentioned—that lady who has now become my wife?"

"Ah, my lord! if you force me to speak," replied Furlo, "I must at least tell the truth. I am sorry for your lordship—but perhaps it may be hurried up—"

"What mean you?" ejaculated the Minister; and he wondered how anything of all that was uppermost in his own thoughts, could be known to the old miser.

"Methinks, my lord," rejoined Furlo, "that the sooner you take some step, the better: for La Dolina told me—"

"La Dolina!" cried Ramorino: "what that vile haridan—"

"Ah, my lord! if there had not been such ladies as the Marchioness di Mirano—saving your Excellency's presence—to patronise La Dolina, she would not have been enabled to drive the traffic that she did—"

"Well, well," interrupted the Count, burning with impatience: "but what about Lucrezia di Mirano? She patronised La Dolina, you said?"

"Yes, my lord: and a certain French gentleman—it appears his name was M. Marcellin—"

"Yes—M. Marcellin—a French gentleman. Proceed!"

"He made her confess, my lord, before the French Ambassador, that she had sold poison to the Marchioness di Mirano. He had found a phial in her ladyship's writing-desk—"

"And do you mean to tell me," asked the Count, while a shudder passed throughout his form,—"do you mean to tell me that the wretched woman La Dolina told such a tale of falsehood against the Marchioness of Mirano?"

"Whether true or false, my lord," rejoined Furlo, "she told the tale—she gave it in writing

to the French Ambassador—she signed it with her own hand."

"And M. Marcellin was present?" inquired Ramorino.

"Yes: and he bade her lose no time in leaving Florence, my lord."

"Then this was yesterday?" said the Minister of Police.

"Yes—this was yesterday. Perhaps, my lord, you will be astonished that I should know anything of all these circumstances," continued Furlo: "but I will tell you how it happened. For some years past, La Dolina has been accustomed to leave her little savings in my hands, so that I might place them out at interest; and she suddenly came to me yesterday for the purpose of recalling what was due to her. Having known her for so long a time—"

"An eligible acquaintance, Signor Furlo!" said the Minister. "Proceed. Having known her for so long a time—"

"It was natural enough, my lord, that we should get chatting together," continued Furlo; "although of course I did not admire La Dolina's character generally. But however, we got chatting together; and she explained to me the reasons which induced her to leave Florence. In fact, my lord, she asked me to receive a few little debts that are owing to her, and to sell off her furniture, and remit her the produce; but I would have nothing to do with the business until she acquainted me with the reasons of her abrupt departure."

"Perdition!" muttered the Minister of Police to himself; "step by step I seem to be floundering farther and farther into a morass of difficulties! And Lucrezia too—danger upon danger accumulates!—peril upon peril!"

He mused painfully for a few moments; and then he said, "But tell me, old man—what has this silly gossip of La Dolina got to do with the transaction which I was just now proposing to you?—why reject the security that was offered? Have I not told you that the lady of whom we are speaking has become my wife?"

"Since your lordship compels me to proclaim the truth," answered the old man; "I am bound to confess that I do not like the business, nor yet the security. You are very powerful as a Minister no doubt, my lord: but you would be totally unable to protect the lady against the hand of justice, if that hand were outstretched to clutch her. And then I have heard—in fact, I know that according to the law a person's property is always liable to confiscation for high crimes and felonies such as this; and it is very evident that something hostile is intended by that M. Marcellin:—or else why should he have everything taken down in black and white before the French Ambassador?"

"But remember, Furlo," said the Minister, "that Lucrezia di Mirano's property has become mine by marriage!"

"I am not so sure of that, my lord," interrupted the old man. "Some eighteen or twenty years ago, I lost a good round sum through a particular decision rendered by the criminal tribunal at Leghorn: for I was living at Leghorn at the time—"

"And that decision?" said the Minister impatiently.

"A lady borrowed a sum of money of me—a

few days afterwards she was arrested on a charge of murdering her illegitimate child—and the tribunal held that all her property was forfeited from the very moment that she had committed the crime. I appealed against a sentence which seemed to be iniquitous: but it was useless——”

“In this present case, Furlo,” interrupted the Minister of Police, “you have me to protect the lady!—me also to hold as a security!”

“Your Excellency could not possibly protect the lady,” replied the old man, “if the French Embassy took up the cause against her. And with regard to your lordship’s security, I think you must admit that I already hold a sufficiency of documents with your name—bills, bonds, mortgages, and so forth.”

“Then you positively refuse,” exclaimed the Minister of Police, “to advance me this sum of money?”

“It grieves me, my lord—it grieves me sorely,” answered the old man, “to give a negative reply; but——”

“Enough!” interrupted Ramorino. “I must seek the amount elsewhere. But beware how you mention aught which La Dolfina may have told you!”

“I am not accustomed to speak on such subjects, my lord; and I should not have alluded to the one whereon we have touched, if it had not been necessary to give your Excellency certain explanations.”

“Enough!” again exclaimed Ramorino; and slouching his hat over his face, and pulling up the collar of his cloak, he issued forth from the miser’s abode.

What was he now to do? It was past eleven o’clock—the Minister of Finance would be waiting for him at the Prefecture: and how was he to satisfy that functionary? Ramorino felt almost like a madman: at one moment he cursed himself for having married Lucrezia, inasmuch as it seemed that by adopting her troubles he had increased his own a thousandfold; at another moment he endeavoured to hug the hope that all would yet be well, that he should by some means or another conquer all difficulties alike for himself and Lucrezia, and that he should consequently enjoy the vast fortune which she had brought him. If he could but get over this one grand embarrassment!—if he could but arrange matters with the Finance Minister! But how was this to be done? It was not until the very instant that the Count of Ramorino was crossing the threshold of the Prefecture, that he perceived a means;—and now he wondered that it had not struck him before.

“Lucrezia has so much in the hands of her banker—and that banker would willingly suffer her to overdraw her account for double or treble the sum. Towards that banker I now represent Lucrezia;—therefore my draft will be as available as her own. Or if there were any doubt as to the banker’s advancing the money, I could but call upon him the first thing in the morning, and arrange for such an advance by giving a mortgage on the Mirano mansion.”

It was thus that the Count of Ramorino arranged the matter within his own mind, as he entered the Prefecture. He at once inquired if the Minister of Finance were waiting?—and he

was answered in the affirmative. He next asked if any arrears had been reported at the Prefecture within the last half-hour? To this query a reply was given in the negative.

The Count ascended to the apartment where the Minister of Finance was seated: and bowing with a cold courtesy to that nobleman, he said, “I have to apologize to your lordship for being half-an-hour behind my time: but the duties of my department detained me elsewhere.”

“No apology is necessary, my lord,” replied the Minister of Finance. “And now I need not keep your Excellency waiting many minutes——”

“Assuredly not,” said Ramorino: “we will finish the business in a moment.”

Thus speaking the Count sat down at a table, and wrote out a cheque.

“Here, my lord,” he said; “you will perhaps do me the honour to send and draw this amount the first thing to-morrow morning; and you can remit to me hither, as on the receipt thereof I will liquidate the salaries according to my promise and intention.”

The Minister of Finance took the cheque; and his first impression was that he had really misjudged Ramorino and had been misled concerning him: but when he saw the names of the bankers, he gave vent to a faint ejaculation of surprise, saying, “But surely your Excellency has no credit at this house?”

Ramorino’s countenance flushed with indignation; and he exclaimed, “Step by step, my lord, do you seem determined to insult, mistrust, and provoke me! I have a credit there—that cheque will be acknowledged.”

“It is most singular,” said the Minister of Finance, “that my own nephew should be head cashier in this very bank: he dined with me this evening—we happened to be speaking about your lordship—and my nephew chanced to mention that your Excellency had never had any dealings at that bank.”

“I have only to say,” rejoined Ramorino, “that this cheque represents the sum which I received four days ago from the Treasury. Of this you may convince yourself to-morrow morning when the bank opens;—and bitterly hostile as your lordship is to me, you can in common fairness and honesty do no more until you shall have put my words to the test by the presentation of the draft.”

“Were it not for the positive conviction I have that your Excellency has no funds in this bank,” responded the Minister of Finance, “I should as a matter of course be well pleased with the arrangement as it stands. But under present circumstances I decline to become the holder of the draft; and I shall deem it my duty to make a full report to the Prime Minister on the morrow.”

The Count of Ramorino stamped his foot with rage for a moment; and he exclaimed, “What if the money belonged to another?—what if I have this day espoused a lady whose immense fortune becomes my own and who has ample funds in that bank? What matters it to you where my resources are or in what they consist, so long as I am enabled to meet all my engagements faithfully? In one word, my lord, you have done as much as accuse me of malversation in respect to the moneys of my department; and I, flinging the lie



back in your teeth, offer to prove to you that the sum thus alluded to is forthcoming at any moment."

"When I came hither, my lord, according to your appointment," said the Minister of Finance, in his cool, quiet, business-like way, "methought it was to behold the entire sum in specie in your strong box. Now it is this piece of paper! You have not even mentioned the name of the lady in the body of the draft——"

"There are no marriage-settlements, my lord," interjected Ramorino impatiently. "But I am growing tired of all this—and I would fain bring the present business to a conclusion. Behold, therefore!—here is the marriage-certificate!—and I believe, my lord, you will acknowledge that Florence possesses no lady more wealthy than the Marchioness di Mirano."

The Minister of Finance started slightly for a moment; then he flung a singular look upon his No. 71.—AGNES.

colleague; then he glanced over the marriage-certificate which had been placed in his hands; and at length he said, "I cannot congratulate your Excellency on the step which you have thus taken: but I am really almost inclined to condole with you on it."

"If this be something more of an evil nature that is in store for me," muttered Ramorino to himself, "I shall go fairly mad!"

"What are you saying, my lord?" inquired the Minister of Finance, with a malignant sneer upon his lips.

"I was wondering, my lord," rejoined Ramorino, assuming an air that was perfectly calm and collected, "whether you would make good the sense of that speech which was thrown out in aspersions of the character of the lady who has become my wife; or whether you intend to provoke me to extremes?"

"If by stating those plain truths which are
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palpable and tangible, I give offence—or if by expressing the impossibility that I experience of congratulating you on your marriage, I likewise provoke your anger,—I must take the consequences, whatever they may be. But I repeat, my lord, I condole with you; for, on my soul! as a living man! you are not happy in the choice you have made—inasmuch, as within the last two hours a warrant has been issued from the Treasury, laying seizure and confiscation on all the property belonging to the Marchioness di Mirano.”

A groan—or rather a sound resembling the rueful lament of a wild beast that is wounded, came forth from the lips of the Count of Ramorino. He staggered back a pace or two, and then recovering himself, he said in a hollow voice, “Is this true, my lord?—is this indeed true? or am I labouring under the influence of some horrible dream? Tell me, my lord—am I wide awake? or am I sleeping? Good God! what does all this mean?”

The wretched man seemed to be smitten blow upon blow; and strong-minded, energetic, self-possessed as he usually was, it must have been under the influence of very painful feelings indeed—oppressed by the most horrowing emotions, that he could have so far lost his self-command as to give vent to such language as that in the presence of his most bitter enemy. Even that enemy himself pitied him for an instant: but this sympathy was transient as a passing wreath of vapour; and he said, “Yes, my lord—a warrant of confiscation has been this evening issued from the Treasury—it is in the hands of the proper officers—and it will be executed to-morrow.”

Tremendous was the effort which Ramorino made to recover his self-command; and he said, “But this measure can be only taken as the consequence of a criminal law procedure, or when some one is accused of a very heinous crime—”

“Such as poisoning, my lord,” interjected the Minister of Finance. “Who better than yourself should know that for years past a woman of infamous character, named La Dolcina, has dwelt in Florence—”

“Ah! Furlo was right!” muttered the Minister of Police. “How the storm is lowering over our heads!—how awfully the thunder-cloud is preparing to burst!”

“Under existing circumstances, my lord,” said the Minister of Finance, “I cannot hold this cheque. It is valueless. The bankers will receive notice of the levy, seizure, and confiscation the first thing in the morning. I leave you now. I was about to tell your Excellency how the Marchioness di Mirano bought poisons of La Dolcina; but I perceived that a mere reference to the infamous woman’s name was sufficient to make you comprehend—or at least to suspect—”

“Enough, my lord! enough!” interrupted the Count of Ramorino vehemently. “It seems as if you were bent on persecuting me to the very utmost! Go!—do your worst! I care not! Confiscate my wife’s money—and you confiscate my own! I shall not be to blame if I am beggared! I had a right to spend what I possessed when calculating on the receipt of vast riches from this marriage of mine. Good night, my lord!—and I envy not your feelings in goading to desperation a man who is already unhappy enough!”

Having thus spoken in a fierce, wild, impassioned manner, the Count of Ramorino—usually so calm, collected, and full of self-possession—rushed forth from the room by one door, leaving the Minister of Finance to issue forth by another. Speeding to his own cabinet, Ramorino walked to and fro like a wild beast pacing and chafing in its cage,—until he grew somewhat calmer. He then rang the bell, and asked if any arrests were reported? The reply was still in the negative; and he said to the man who had answered the summons, “I am about to return to my own house. Let those who have received particular orders from me this evening, bring their reports as soon as they return and when they have any communications to make.”

The Count of Ramorino then left the Prefecture, and strode rapidly through the now deserted streets to his own private residence, which he reached just as the clocks of Florence were proclaiming the hour of midnight.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TWO AMBASSADORS.

WE must now return to Charles De Vere, who, as we have stated in a previous chapter, arrived in Florence in the afternoon of a day that was memorable in the lives of many persons. Having placed himself under the protection of the British Ambassador, he communicated to that functionary everything which had occurred, and they had a long consultation together. A messenger was sent to the hotel at which Charles had originally put up; and the man brought back a letter addressed to our hero. This was the one which Edgar Marcellin had left for him there on the preceding day, and Charles was rejoiced to learn therefrom that the young Frenchman was safe and under the protection of his own Ambassador.

Marcellin said in his letter to Charles that he would immediately obey any summons which might be sent or any appointment which might be made: but he nevertheless recommended caution and prudence in whatever proceedings should be adopted, for reasons that could be explained. Acting by the advice of the English Ambassador, Charles wrote to Marcellin, announcing his safe arrival in Florence after having experienced many strange adventures, and requesting Edgar to come to him after dusk at the British Embassy.

It was half-past six o’clock in the evening when a lady, closely veiled, presented herself at this Embassy, and requested an immediate interview with the British Ambassador. She declared her business to be of the utmost importance; and thus she had no difficulty in obtaining the gratification of her request. In a few minutes she found herself in the presence of the English representative.

“I have a long tale to tell your Excellency,” she began,—“a tale of crimes in one quarter—wrongs and persecutions in another—singular adventures and hair-breadth escapes—”

“Indeed, madam!” ejaculated the Ambassador. “This is an afternoon replete with singular ad-

ventures, and all of a certain description! But your name, madam—you have forgotten to mention it?"

"First let me tell your Excellency that I am very uneasy in reference to an English gentleman. I have just called at his hotel—he is not there—the landlord looked suspicious and would answer no questions——"

"Is it possible, madam," ejaculated the Ambassador, "that you can be the lady of whom I have heard a great deal within the last two or three hours? In a word, madam, pray mention your name; and perhaps I may be enabled to give you some information——"

"It matters not," interjected the lady, "what my proper English name may be. Suffice it for your Excellency to learn that for some time past, while resident in Florence, I have borne the name of Ciprina."

"I thought so!" cried the representative of the English Government. "But how in the name of heaven is it that you are here? Did they liberate you from Bagno?"

"Then Mr. De Vere must have arrived in safety!" exclaimed Ciprina exultingly; "or else your Excellency could know nothing of all these matters!"

"Yea—Mr. De Vere is safe," rejoined the Envoy; "and rest assured, madam, that he was not unmindful of your interests; for a requisition has already been drawn up by me, addressed to the Tuscan Minister of the Interior, demanding your liberation from Bagno—or in default thereof, a declaration of the reasons for which you might be detained. In another half-hour that document would have been in the Minister's hand, if you had not thus unexpectedly made your appearance. But how is it——"

"I have escaped," answered Ciprina. "But tell me—where is Mr. De Vere?"

"Follow me, madam," said the Envoy; and he led the way to another apartment.

As the door of this apartment was opened, Ciprina at once beheld Charles De Vere, who was seated at a table where he had been engaged in writing, but who instantaneously started up with a cry of delight and astonishment on beholding the young lady whom he fancied to be afar off in the fortress of the Apennines.

"Ah, you may indeed give vent to your amazement, Mr. De Vere," said the Envoy; "for the escape of a lady from a castle must be even more surprising than that of a gentleman."

At this moment there was a knock at the door which the Ambassador had just closed: he himself turned to answer the summons—and Edgar Marcellin made his appearance. He was personally unknown alike to the British Ambassador and Charles de Vere; but his name was announced by the confidential lacquy who had been instructed to introduce him thither immediately upon his arrival. Ciprina spoke not a word: she experienced an almost overpowering feeling on finding herself again in the presence of that man on whose account she had endured and suffered so much, and whom she had begun to love with a chaster and purer passion than she had ever previously known, at the time when they were so suddenly and rudely separated.

"Good heavens, Ciprina!" ejaculated Mar-

cellin; "is it possible that you also are here?"—and advancing towards the young lady he pressed her hand with all the fervid cordiality of that grateful friendship which he experienced towards her.

"I shall leave you all three to your own explanations," said the British Envoy; "for it is now time that I should go and consult his Excellency the French Ambassador, in respect to the plan of proceedings which we are to adopt."

Thus speaking, the representative of the British Government left the apartment, where Charles de Vere, Ciprina, and Marcellin remained together.

"Hitherto we have personally been strangers to each other," said Marcellin, thus addressing himself to our young hero; "but circumstances ought to make us friends in a moment—for we are rowing as it were in the same boat."

"We are leagued together in the same cause," ejaculated De Vere, "and we will conquer!"

The two young men then shook hands with all the ardour of alliance and friendship; and the conversation quickly became most deeply interesting alike to themselves and Ciprina. Marcellin now learnt how they had both been carried off from the Mirano mansion on the night of the 1st of November—how they had been conveyed to Bagno—how Charles had escaped from the fortress in the evening of the 2nd of November—and how he had arrived that day (November 3rd) in Florence, in company with the village magistrate. Then Ciprina told her tale—how on this same day (namely, November 3rd) she had effected her own escape in the baker's basket—and how she had arrived scarcely an hour back at Florence in company with the Herdress family. Edgar Marcellin spoke last; and when his turn came, he acquainted De Vere and Ciprina with everything which had occurred to himself after he had awakened in the morning of the previous day (November 2nd) and found himself alone in his chamber at the Mirano mansion.

"Now," said Charles, "let us all three sit down at this table and hold a consultation: for though our course is tolerably clear, yet must we pursue it with due carefulness and circumspection."

The three sat down accordingly; and Ciprina observed with a smile, "It appears, therefore, that while we are deliberating here, the two Ambassadors are holding a consultation elsewhere."

"Yea," said Charles; "because they themselves feel that the affair is somewhat a delicate one, and must be conducted with caution and prudence. At least such is the opinion of the British Ambassador——"

"And such," interjected Marcellin, "is the view which the French Envoy likewise takes of it. In respect to myself, there is no disguising the fact that the Marchioness di Mirano may at any moment proclaim abroad the infamous accusation which she privately and secretly hurled in my face in February last; and if so, a warrant might be issued against me. It would then be difficult for the French Ambassador to save me from temporary arrest—although he has given me the assurance that he is quite prepared to stretch his authority in a case so singular and peculiar as that in which we are now engaged."

"And the British Ambassador," said De Vere, "has likewise his own good reasons for advancing

cautiously and circumspectly in the matter. Because, after all, I am a prisoner escaped from Bagno—he has only my bare word for the injustice of my arrest—and though he of course believes me and knows that what I have stated is true, yet this is only as between gentleman and gentleman; whereas in his *official* capacity he ought at once to communicate with the Tuscan Government, demand explanations with reference to my arrest, and notify his readiness to give me up provided the grounds of that arrest shall be proved to be valid and sufficient."

"Well then," remarked Ciprina, "it is clear that the two Ambassadors have every possible reason for proceeding cautiously and with due circumspection."

"They are now consulting together," said Marcellin: "we also shall proceed with our discussion—we may presently compare notes with them, and we shall be enabled to determine upon a specific course of action. Besides, it would be imprudent to take any step until we have Signor Paoli with us. The French Ambassador conceives it highly important in the making out of a case against Lucrezia di Mirano, that the father of the murdered youth should give his testimony."

"And such is precisely the view entertained by the British Ambassador," said De Vere. "There can be no doubt that the Marchioness is strongly protected by the Count of Ramorino; and she has therefore a tower of strength on her side. We have the two Ambassadors: but then it must be remembered that the Ambassadors can only wield on our behalf such weapons as diplomatic privilege legitimately places in their hands,—whereas, on the other hand, there is an unscrupulous Minister of Police, all-powerful in his own department, and able to set in motion a variety of tremendous engines of defence and protection for the guilty Lucrezia."

"I am glad," said Ciprina, "that we are looking the whole matter thus rationally in the face, and considering it logically. At what time is Signor Paoli expected in Florence?"

"Antonia is not quite sure," replied Marcellin. "She first of all told me at eight o'clock: but she subsequently reflected that she must have made a mistake, and that Petroro told her between nine and ten. I have not taken any step to ascertain the point correctly from Petroro; for I thought that the less communication there might be with his house the better, as Ramorino's spies are doubtless everywhere. Therefore, at about nine o'clock we will go to Petroro's and meet Paoli—unless any other plan of proceeding in respect to this particular point shall be resolved upon."

"And you have the substantial materials of evidence?" said Ciprina to Marcellin.

"Yes—the pistol and suit of male apparel, which I brought away with me from the Mirano mansion. And then, too, I have the groom Bernardo at the French Embassy—and his evidence will be more or less important. And there is Antonia likewise; and presently we shall have Paoli."

"But now," said De Vere, "to touch upon another point. There is the poisoning affair——"

"La Dolina's confession and the phial containing the poison," responded Marcellin, "are in the hands of the French Envoy. Now that Ciprina

is with us, it can be proved that the Marchioness di Mirano *did* make use of that poison in the hope of ridding herself alike of Ciprina and of me; and the French Ambassador knows those particulars of the entire history as well as all the rest; so that this point will not be omitted from the discussion which he is now holding with the British representative."

"And lastly," said De Vere, "you have that letter which you found in Lucrezia's writing-desk."

"That also is in the hands of the French Envoy," responded Edgar. "It proves how unscrupulous Ramorino is in using his power on behalf of his mistress."

"I think you just now said," observed Ciprina, "that it is a letter written by Count Ramorino to the Marchioness at the villa in the Vale of Arno to the effect that I and the person who was found with me at the time had been arrested during the past night."

"And this letter," rejoined Edgar Marcellin, "will hereafter serve as the ground of complaint to be made by the two Ambassadors to the Tuscan Government against Ramorino, inasmuch as it is thereby proved that to satisfy the demands of his mistress he thinks nothing of plunging French or English subjects into captivity. In reference to the Marchioness, I would add," continued Edgar, "that there are a couple of spies watching all her movements."

"Ah! this was well thought of," ejaculated De Vere. "And those spies?"

"Two domestics of the French Ambassador," answered Marcellin: "they are dressed in mean apparel—and depend upon it, they know how to perform their part."

The two young men and Ciprina continued in deliberation for some time upon the various features of the case in which they were engaged. At length, when it was verging towards eight o'clock, the British Envoy returned to the room where the trio had been holding their discussion. The great diplomatic functionary's countenance wore that expression of mingled firmness and gravity which showed that some important step had been resolved upon, if not already taken.

"Madam," he said, at once addressing himself to Ciprina, and handing her a paper, "I believe that the statement embodied in this document comprises the evidence which you are enabled to give in reference to an attempt made by Lucrezia di Mirano to poison yourself and M. Marcellin. You were in your chamber—you affected to be asleep—you watched the proceedings of the Marchioness——"

"Yes," said Ciprina, having glanced her eyes over the paper: "every statement in this document is perfectly correct."

"It is according to the report which I myself gave to the French Ambassador," interjected Marcellin, who likewise glanced at the document as it lay before Ciprina on the table.

"Then have the goodness to sign it, madam," said the British Envoy: and when the young lady had affixed her signature, he added his own as that of the attesting witness.

His Excellency placed the document in an envelope; and going to the door of the apartment, he gave the packet to a servant who was waiting,

and who immediately set off to bear it to its destination.

"I will now inform you," said the British Envoy, "of the steps that have been taken—or rather which are immediately about to be taken, in this difficult and peculiar case. You may rest assured that the French Envoy and I have given it our very best consideration; and I think you will approve of the conclusion to which we have arrived as the most efficient means of bringing the entire matter to an issue. For let it be borne in mind that the main object, after all, is to clear *your* character, M. Marcellin, from any aspersions which Lucrezia di Mirano may in her desperation or malignity throw upon it. Well then, if we can at the very outset prove the Marchioness di Mirano to be capable of one heinous crime, we furnish a good ground for the supposition that she was guilty of *another*. In plain terms, we mean to accuse her at once of the crime of dealing with the poisoner La Dolfina, and attempting to administer poison purchased from that woman; and we shall demand that justice may promptly take its course on that charge."

"This is no doubt well planned," said De Vere; "for if once the Marchioness be arrested as a poisoner, it will give weight to the other accusation which will be made against her. And who indeed would believe her if, under such circumstances, she turned round and proclaimed *yow*, M. Marcellin, to be the assassin of the unfortunate page Giulio?"

"Besides," continued the British Envoy, "in having two cases to deal with, we naturally select the stronger. Now in one instance the evidence is positive: in the other it is only circumstantial. We take the case where the evidence is positive: we charge Lucrezia di Mirano with being a great criminal—we paralyze her—we beat down all her strongholds and defences—we render it impossible for Ramorino, if he have any regard for his own character, to continue his protection in respect to so vile a woman."

"Yes," said Marcellin, "the arrangements are well taken. And now, what is the process to be adopted with regard to her?"

"The French Envoy has taken the matter in hand," replied the British Ambassador. "Immediately upon the receipt of the document which I just now sent to his Excellency, he will proceed to the Minister of the Interior, to whom he will represent the facts. It is not necessary in this case to go to Ramorino for a warrant. Besides, it can be proved by the letter which you, M. Marcellin, found in Lucrezia di Mirano's writing-desk, that the Minister of Police would rather shield her from arrest, or else aid in her escape, than suffer justice to take its course."

"To be sure!" observed Marcellin; "and it is therefore fortunate that the intervention of Ramorino need *not* be sought in carrying out the present purpose. And what follows the application to the Minister of the Interior?" inquired the young Frenchman.

"Two distinct warrants will be granted," replied the British Envoy,—"one authorizing the arrest of Lucrezia di Mirano as a person accused of the felony of dealing with poisons; and the other emanating from the Treasury, levying immediate seizure and confiscation upon all the property of

the Marchioness, to await the issue of the trial which she must undergo."

"And these warrants," said Marcellin—"when will they be issued?"

"Presently," rejoined the British Envoy. "Ah! I forgot to observe that the Marchioness is at Count Ramorino's private dwelling. One of the spies of the French Ambassador tracked her thither at about seven o'clock."

"Will the warrant for her arrest be executed there?" inquired De Vere.

"No," responded the Envoy. "The Minister of the Interior will of course command that the privacy of his colleague's abode shall be respected;—the warrant will not therefore be executed until the Marchioness returns to her own house. In respect to yourselves, there is little doubt that in consequence of the representations which the French Ambassador purposes to address to the Minister of the Interior, your persons will be protected against all molestation pending the proceedings that are about to take place."

Everything that was thus reported to the two young gentlemen and Ciprina, experienced their warmest approval; and the British Envoy was cordially thanked for the trouble he was taking in the matter.

It was about a quarter to nine o'clock when the Ambassador was summoned from the apartment: but he almost immediately returned, introducing the French Envoy.

"I have succeeded," said this last-named functionary, "in everything that I undertook with the Minister of the Interior. In the first place, he has granted his warrant for the arrest of the Marchioness di Mirano, and which warrant will be executed either to-night or to-morrow morning, according to circumstances. In the second place, the Minister of the Interior has sent a formal demand to the Treasury, desiring his colleague the Minister of Finance to issue a warrant of confiscation against the property of Lucrezia di Mirano. In the third place, here is a *safe-conduct*, or special passport, for each of you three,—exempting you from the possibility of arrest on any ordinary warrant. Indeed, not even all the power of Count Ramorino himself can now interfere with your freedom!"

Thus speaking, the French Envoy delivered the three passports, or safe-conducts, to Ciprina, De Vere, and Marcellin respectively.

"You will perceive, M. Marcellin," said the French representative, "that the names of Bernardo and Antonio are included in your safe-conduct; and thus they likewise are free from the danger of arrest. By the bye, I ought to have added that the Minister of the Interior will be careful to avoid the chance of suffering his colleague Ramorino to know what is transpiring in this case, for fear lest the Minister of Police should give timely warning to his mistress Lucrezia, and thus enable her to escape from the fatal consequences of her crimes."

The thanks which had been previously given to the British Envoy, were now renewed towards the French representative: and then De Vere said to Marcellin—"Let us now go and meet Paoli at Signor Petroro's."

"Ah! if I had thought of it," exclaimed the French Ambassador, "I would have procured a

safe-conduct for Paoli also. But no matter! I dare say that no harm will occur to him to-night, and if it should be otherwise, we must make the best of it. Bid him be cautious; and to-morrow a suitable passport shall be forthcoming for his protection."

The two Ambassadors withdrew; and Ciprina said to the young gentlemen, "You will escort me as far as my hotel; for I can scarcely remain here while you proceed to the appointment at Petrero's."

"We will escort you to your hotel," answered Charles De Vere; "and rest assured that you shall receive due intelligence of whatsoever may presently transpire, if it be of importance."

The two young gentlemen and Ciprina now went forth together from the mansion of the British Ambassador. Marcellin and De Vere left Ciprina at her hotel; and they began to bend their way towards the street where Signor Petrero dwelt, just as nine o'clock was being proclaimed from all the church towers of Florence.

Be it borne in recollection that it was precisely at this same hour that Father Falconara issued from the residence of Count Ramorino, after having tied the nuptial knot between that functionary and Lucrezia di Mirano. It happened that just as De Vere and Marcellin were turning the corner of a street, they encountered the young priest exactly opposite a chemist's window, which poured forth a glare of light that rendered a recognition instantaneous betwixt our young hero and Father Falconara.

"Worthy and excellent friend!" exclaimed De Vere, seizing the priest's hand and pressing it with enthusiasm. "Oh, how rejoiced I am to have this opportunity——"

"Hush! hush!" interrupted Father Falconara, in a peremptory tone; and it was with a strange degree of violence that he dragged our hero some little way aside. "Is it possible that you have communicated to that gentleman who is with you, anything—I mean——Ah! perhaps you comprehend what I do mean?"

"I simply told him the truth, holy father," replied De Vere, at once understanding the cause of the young ecclesiastic's excitement; "I said that I seized upon you and overpowered you at Bagno——"

"Enough! enough!" interrupted the priest. "But you, insensate that you are! to be thus abroad in the streets of Florence! Can you not conjecture wherefore I am here? My object has been to report to Count Ramorino, Minister of the Tuscan Police, your escape from the fortress of Bagno—and that of the lady who was taken thither with you. But you are perhaps ignorant that she likewise has escaped?"

"No—I am aware of it," replied De Vere. "But fear not on my account! Ramorino is powerless towards me."

"Ah! is this so?" exclaimed Falconara, with a look that demonstrated all the real pleasure his generous heart experienced on receiving this assurance.

"Yes, it is so," repeated De Vere. "And now I bethink me, perhaps it might be as well to draw up a statement or sign some paper, in vindication of Captain Belluori, in case he may be suspected of either complicity or neglect with regard to my escape."

"If you would do this," said the priest, "it would make sure doubly sure!"

"I will do it with pleasure," rejoined De Vere. "At this moment I have important business on hand: but if you will come to me presently at the British Embassy—let us say at eleven o'clock—unless indeed it be too late for you——"

"No—it will not be too late," answered the young priest. "At eleven o'clock I will be with you at the British Embassy."

The ecclesiastic passed on; De Vere and Edgar Marcellin pursued their way towards Petrero's house. On reaching their destination, they learnt from Petrero that Signor Paoli had not as yet arrived; and it struck them both that the man did not appear to be in the best of all possible humours.

"Does anything ail you?" inquired Marcellin.

"The truth is, signors," replied Petrero, "I am afraid of all these comings and goings; it takes so little to compromise a man in the estimation of our Minister of Police——"

"Rest assured that you will be protected," interrupted De Vere.

"Protected indeed!" ejaculated Petrero. "I certainly do not see how. Nevertheless, for Paoli's sake——"

"I tell you how you will be protected," said Charles. "I am an Englishman—my companion is a Frenchman—and our Ambassadors will see injury done to no person on our account. Besides, we ourselves are protected by your own Government:—the Minister of the Interior holds his shield over our heads; and as a proof of the statement I am making to you, behold the safe-conduct with which I am provided."

"And here is mine," added Marcellin.

Petrero's countenance brightened up when he beheld these documents which the two young men showed him; and he said, "Well, signors, I am glad to find that you are thus powerfully protected. Whosoever enjoys the favour of the Minister of the Interior, may defy the Minister of Police. And now what is your pleasure? Will you remain here until Paoli shall arrive? or is it your desire that I should send a message to intimate——"

"If you are certain that he will come," interrupted De Vere, "we had better wait: for although we have given you certain positive assurances on your own account, yet it must be borne in mind that Paoli is more exposed by circumstances to the persecutions of the police, and it were only consistent with prudence on our part to avoid attracting suspicion of any kind towards your house."

"Wait, then, by all means, signors," said Petrero, who was now completely civil: "it is the coming and going backwards and forwards of which I am so apprehensive."

De Vere and Marcellin accordingly waited at Petrero's house: and it was not until past ten o'clock that Paoli made his appearance. He had been detained on the road by circumstances over which he had no control, but which it is not worth while to place on record here. Marcellin presented De Vere to the Neapolitan refugee; and exciting indeed was the intelligence which awaited that unfortunate father of the murdered Giulio. The net which her own iniquity had woven was fast closing in around the Marchioness of Marengo.

and Paoli, on hearing that the warrant was actually issued for her arrest, clasped his hands fervidly, exclaiming, "My poor boy will yet be avenged!"

Marcellin and De Vere acquainted Paoli with all that they themselves, as well as Ciprina, had respectively undergone at the instigation of the Marchioness; and the Neapolitan listened with the deepest interest to these narratives. He poured forth his gratitude to both the young men for the interest they had displayed on behalf of the cause wherein he himself was so greatly interested; and he begged them to convey the assurance of a similar sentiment to Ciprina.

The narratives, explanations, and discussions occupied a long time; and nearly two hours passed away in this manner, Charles De Vere totally forgetting the appointment which he had made with Father Falconara. At length, when it only wanted a few minutes of midnight, he suddenly recollected it; and he rose to take his departure. Marcellin was in readiness to accompany him; but ere taking leave of Paoli, they enjoined him to remain perfectly quiet at Petraro's house, assuring him that he should be made acquainted with everything of importance that might occur in the course of the proceedings wherein they were all so much interested.

On leaving Petraro's house, the two young gentlemen walked together in the direction of the British Embassy, that being Marcellin's route, as well as De Vere's, for a certain distance. On reaching the gate of the Embassy, just as the clocks of Florence were proclaiming the hour of midnight, they were shaking hands in order to bid each other farewell until the morrow, when all in a moment they were surrounded by a posse of *sbirri* who seemed suddenly to concentrate themselves there from different directions.

"Separate them! gag them!" ejaculated the officer in command of the party, and whom Charles De Vere at once recognised to be the same who had superintended the expedition when he and Ciprina were hurried away from Florence to Bagno.

"Stop!" exclaimed Marcellin: "at your peril do this!"

"We are under the protection," cried De Vere, "of your own Government!"

"Gag them!" ejaculated the officer in a commanding tone.

"Then let us act in self-defence!" cried De Vere: and with one desperate effort he cleared himself from the grasp which two of the *sbirri* had fixed upon him.

They were hurled to the ground: a similar exploit was at the same moment performed by Marcellin; and then De Vere exclaimed, "We are provided with safe-conducts from the Minister of the Interior!"

The officer of the *sbirri*, who was furious at beholding his men so rudely treated, had drawn his sword and was rushing on with the rest of his party to recapture the two young gentlemen, when the term *safe-conduct* seemed to paralyse him. He stopped short: his men did the same; and Marcellin said, "Depart at once, or it will be the worse for you!"

"It is a trick! a stratagem!" exclaimed the officer. "The Englishman there"—and he pointed to De Vere—"played me a double game before

now: but he shall not repeat it on the present occasion! Seize him!"

While the officer was yet speaking, both our hero and Marcellin had drawn forth their safe-conducts; and they held them up in the light of the lamp over the gate of the British Embassy.

"Halt, my men!" exclaimed the officer, as the *sbirri* were about to precipitate themselves once more upon Charles and Edgar. "If this is so, the signature of his Excellency the Minister of the Interior must be respected."

"Behold that signature!" said De Vere. "But beware how you make any attempt to snatch the paper from my hand: for, by heaven! if you do—"

"Do you think, signor," demanded the officer indignantly, "that I am capable of such a base dishonest action?"

"In good sooth," answered De Vere, "I think you are capable of anything: for a more unmitigated set of cut-throat scoundrels than you Tuscan police-officers, I never in all my life had the misfortune to encounter!"

It was almost a howl of rage which burst from the lips of the officer of the *sbirri*, while kindred ejaculations denoted the fury of his adherents. But they dared not proceed to farther violence: there was a talismanic influence in the signature of the Minister of the Interior.

"Well," growled the officer, "you are quit, young men, on the present occasion: but I dare say it will not be long before I shall catch both tripping in some rascally fashion!"

But here the fellow's insolence was suddenly cut short; for De Vere dealt him a blow which knocked him down as if he had been stricken by a flash of lightning. The blood gushed from his mouth, for half-a-dozen of his teeth had been dashed out.

"Ruffian!" said our young hero; "if ever a man were rightly served, it is you! You have brought this punishment upon yourself entirely by your own impertinence."

The officer spoke not another word. He rose slowly from the ground, wiping his mouth with his kerchief; while his men, armed though they were, retreated a pace or two, evidently afraid lest the same species of chastisement should overtake themselves. They departed with their discomfited officer at their head; and when they were beyond the view of the young gentlemen, these two took leave of each other.

On entering the mansion of the British Embassy, Charles was informed that a priest had been waiting for upwards of an hour, to see him; he was accordingly hastening in the direction of his own apartment, when he met one of the *attachés*, who said to him, "Ranorino has been here!"

"Indeed!" ejaculated Charles. "And what said he?"

"Oh! I received him on behalf of his Excellency," replied the *attaché*, thus alluding to the Ambassador; "and I mystified him completely. You may think it a difficult thing to mystify a Minister of Police; and yet let me assure you that I did it! He evidently suspects that a storm of some kind is brewing: there was a certain uneasiness in his manner, despite all his efforts to conceal it; but he went away without obtaining the slightest intelligence from me."

Charles thanked the *attaché*, and passed on to his own room, where he found Father Falconara waiting.

"I have to offer a thousand apologies," exclaimed our hero, "for being thus upwards of an hour behind the appointment which I myself made with you: but business detained me elsewhere——"

"No excuse is necessary," interrupted the ecclesiastic. "I know that you would have come sooner if you had been able."

"There is nothing I would not do," cried De Vere enthusiastically, "to demonstrate my friendship and gratitude towards you; for never, never shall I forget the generous service you rendered me!"

"I rendered you a service, Signor De Vere?" said Father Falconara, with a covert tone and look. "Ought I not to complain of the treatment I have received at your hands?"

"Ah! to be sure!" cried Charles, laughing. "Well, we will not touch any more upon the subject. But at all events we are not now within the walls of the fortress of Bagno—you are not speaking to Number Twenty-nine, but to an individual possessed of a name. Let us converse freely. You may now be permitted to listen while I tell you that I was carried off from Florence by a mistake—I was taken for another—that very gentleman with whom you are now conversing. It was at the investigation of a lady of high rank, but who is steeped to the very lips in crime——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Falconara: "can it be the lady whom I saw just now?"

"There is no secret in the matter," resumed De Vere; "for all Florence will to-morrow ring with the name of that lady!"

"Ah!" again ejaculated the priest: "is such a storm as this indeed brewing?"

"It is as I tell your reverence," rejoined De Vere.

"And you allude," said Father Falconara, "to——" and he still hesitated to pronounce the name for fear lest after all there should be some mistake in the matter.

"The Marchioness of Mirano," exclaimed Charles.

"Then it is so!"—and the priest looked confounded.

"What! do you likewise know something relative to this vile woman?" exclaimed our hero. "But, Ah! doubtless you met her at the Count of Ramorino's?—for I think you told me ere now that you had been to make a certain report——"

"Yes—it was there that I met her," rejoined the priest. "But tell me, of what is she accused? why will all Florence ring with her name in the course of a few hours? Surely there must be some mistake? The Minister of Police himself——"

"He is a villain, and he protects her!" cried Charles. "He is her paramour."

"Not now," answered the young ecclesiastic; and then he added solemnly, "Count Ramorino is her husband."

Charles De Vere was stricken with amazement—as well he might be—at this intelligence: but it was now his turn to fancy there was some mistake—and he said, "Are you sure of what you tell me? This lady to whom I allude——"

"Is young and beautiful," interjected Father

Falconara. "Ah! I recollect! she was much excited when I spoke of the escape of the young lady. But that Lucrezia di Mirano is now the wife of the Count di Ramorino you may rest assured: for only three hours have elapsed since my lips pronounced the nuptial blessing."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Charles, "what a bride has the Count of Ramorino taken unto himself! Can it be possible that he is acquainted with her iniquities?"

"And those iniquities?" said the priest inquiringly.

"She is a murderess!" answered Charles.

Father Falconara staggered as if the astonishment which smote him was a veritable blow physically dealt; and clasping his hands together, he murmured, "Good heavens! that I should have pronounced a blessing on the head of such a sinner!"

At this moment the door burst open, and Edgar Marcellin rushed into the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RAMORINO'S BEIDE.

THE instant the young Frenchman made his appearance, it was easy to perceive that he was in a very excited state; and Charles De Vere sprang forward to ask what was the matter—for he dreaded lest some new misfortune should have occurred.

"I will not endure this another minute!" exclaimed Edgar. "No! I will not lay my head upon my pillow this night until some step be taken to vindicate myself! What to me are all the safe-conducts in the world if I am thus to be accused of the most atrocious crime?"

"Tranquillise yourself, my dear friend," said Charles. "You need not leave the room, holy father," he added, turning towards the young priest. "You already know that Lucrezia di Mirano is a murderess——"

"But you have yet to hear," exclaimed Marcellin, vehemently, "that the vile woman dares attempt to cast the blood-red shadow of her crime upon me!"

"Explain what has happened!" cried Charles De Vere.

"On reaching the mansion of the French Embassy," said Marcellin, "a scene occurred of a nature similar to that which greeted us just now at the gate of this Embassy. I was suddenly seized upon by a posse of *sbirri*, and the officer in command said that he arrested me on the charge of murdering Giulio Paoli. You may be well assured that I indignantly repelled the atrocious accusation; and I demanded who was my accuser. To this no reply was given; and in my rage and anger I exclaimed, 'I know that it is Lucrezia di Mirano who charges me with this crime; but she herself committed it!'—The officer counselled me to hold my peace and accompany him quietly. I produced my safe-conduct; he seemed uncertain how to act; but this indecision on his part quickly vanished, and he said that under existing circumstances he must execute the warrant which he held in his hand. At that very instant whose carriage



should pass along the street but that of the Minister of the Interior? The Minister himself was seated therein; and I insisted on having the matter referred to his Excellency. The *sbirri* were for dragging me away; but I resisted them—the carriage stopped—the Minister of the Interior inquired into the nature of the disturbance—and he ordered the *sbirri* to leave me at liberty, declaring that he himself would be answerable that I should be forthcoming at any time when my appearance might be required. Thus the matter was so far settled," added Marcellin: "but the accusation of murder has been openly made against me, and I cannot endure it!"

"You need not excite yourself to such a degree," said De Vere; "for you see plainly enough that the Minister of the Interior does not believe in the tale."

"Nevertheless that vile wicked woman shall be forced to withdraw the accusation at once!" ex-

claimed Marcellin. "I will not sleep, I tell you, De Vere, until this point be gained. There can now be no delay!"

"One word," interposed Father Falconara. "That woman on whose head my lips just now pronounced a blessing——"

"What does this mean?" asked the young Frenchman, appealing with a bewildered air to Charles De Vere.

"It means," was our hero's response, "that Lucrezia de Mirano has become the wife of the Count of Ramorico."

"Oh! then I wish him joy of his bride!" exclaimed Marcellin, with mingled bitterness and fierceness. "But this shall not prevent me——"

"One moment!" again interjected Father Falconara. "I was about to observe that inasmuch as my lips ere now pronounced a blessing on the head of that woman, it is for me to return into her presence and to use whatsoever influence my

sacred character gives me to induce her to confess her iniquities."

"Go then, if you think that you will succeed," exclaimed Marcellin. "Go! But I fear that the errand will be a vain one."

"Stop!" said Charles: "may not this be giving a warning to Lucrezia, showing her that the storm-cloud is about to burst?"

"By this time," interrupted Marcellin, "Ramorino must know that we have safe-conducts in our possession, and that his emissaries have therefore failed to arrest us. Whatsoever is to be suspected, he now suspects. Father Falconara cannot possibly do any harm by seeing Lucrezia di Mirano; and if by any accident he should succeed in obtaining from her the acknowledgment that she is foully perjured, my mind will be as far set at rest. We all know," added the young Frenchman aside to De Vere, "that the priests possess an immense influence in this country—particularly over women; and who can tell but that the wretched Lucrezia may confess everything in the hope of being leniently dealt with?"

"But what if, on the other hand, she were to take alarm and escape?" inquired De Vere.

"Let us adopt measures to prevent such an occurrence," rejoined Marcellin. "I will tell you how. While Father Falconara proceeds to execute his own proposal, we will hasten to the Minister of the Interior—we will convey the intelligence that Lucrezia is married to Ramorino—and it will follow that the warrant for her arrest may be at once executed, as there can be no possible need for the observance of any further delicacy towards the Minister of Police—I mean on the part of his colleague the Minister of the Interior."

"Be it as you propose," said De Vere; "and under all circumstances I myself now incline to the opinion that the sooner the blow is struck the better."

Father Falconara and the two young men issued forth from the British Embassy together; but the priest soon separated from Charles and Edgar, and bent his way towards the private residence of the Count of Ramorino.

To this functionary we must now return. We said at the close of the previous chapter that the clocks of Florence were proclaiming the hour of midnight as the Count of Ramorino turned his steps homeward. He found Lucrezia in a state of the utmost anxiety and suspense; but it was nothing calculated to reassure her that Ramorino had to impart. On the contrary, fresh blows were now to strike the miserable woman.

"What have you done?" she asked, flying towards her husband the moment he entered the room where she had been so anxiously awaiting him. "Oh! how sombre are your looks!"

"Sombre?" echoed the Minister fiercely. "Is it not enough to make my looks sombre—nay, more, to madden me—to drive me wild with rage—"

"Rage!" cried Lucrezia. "For what?" she demanded in afflict.

"Rage!" thundered forth Ramorino,—"rage at my own accursed folly for having married you!"

"Oh! are you about to reproach me?" exclaimed Lucrezia, in a voice of rending appeal. "It was not I who forced myself upon you!"

"Never mind how it happened!" cried the Minister: "it is all the same! You are linked to me—you, the murderess!"

A shriek pealed from Lucrezia's lips.

"You, the dabbler in poisons!" vociferated Ramorino.

Another and louder scream rent the very walls of the apartment.

"Hush!—or by heaven, I will do you a mischief!" exclaimed her husband. "Would you alarm the household? And yet, God knows you have enough to scream, and shriek, and weep for, wretched woman!—for you are beggared!"

"Beggared?" echoed Lucrezia. "What can you mean?"

"I mean that you are beggared!" responded her husband, as if with all the fierceness of a retort. "Your property is confiscated! And what is more, Lucrezia! what is more—there is a warrant issued for your apprehension on account of your dealings with La Dufina!"

"Save me! save me!" cried the wretched woman, falling upon her knees in the presence of her husband. "But O God! is this indeed true?"

"It is true that a warrant of confiscation has been issued," answered Ramorino; "and as a matter of course a warrant for your arrest must have been signed at the same moment. Rise, rise!—tears are useless! Useless also is it to appeal to me! I am a ruined man!—to-morrow all my honours and dignities will be taken from me! We shall both be plunged down into the very vortex of destruction—unless indeed—"

"Unless what?" demanded Lucrezia, with nervous quickness as she sprang up to her feet. "Is there a hope? What were you going to say? We shall be destroyed, unless—"

"Unless a miracle be wrought by heaven in our favour," replied the Minister of Police; "and that will not be done!"

Lucrezia sank down upon a chair, weeping and sobbing bitterly.

"Oh! I must fly! I must fly!" she suddenly ejaculated, as she started up to her feet. "I must depart!"

"Hush! some one comes!" interrupted the Count.

Lucrezia ceased from her passionate ejaculations; and she turned aside to conceal her emotions as a domestic entered the apartment.

"My lord," said the lacquey, "an officer of *sbirri*, to whom you entrusted some special business—"

"I will come to him," interrupted Ramorino; and he accordingly issued from the apartment.

Proceeding to a waiting-room, to which the officer had been shown, Ramorino at once anxiously inquired, "What tidings do you bring?"

"The arrests could not be effected, my lord," answered the functionary.

"Not effected? To whom do you allude?" demanded the Count.

"To De Vere and Marcellin," was the response.

"Why! what has happened?" ejaculated the Minister. "Your face is stained with blood—you speak strangely—"

"I have been cruelly maltreated, my lord," answered the *sbirro*, "by those two young men."

"And they have doubtless escaped!" said the Minister. "Well—as matters now stand, it is of no consequence—I care nothing at present for their arrest—"

"They possess safe-conducts, my lord."

"Ah! is this so?" cried the Count.

"Yes, my lord," rejoined the *stirro*,—"safe-conducts signed by the Minister of the Interior."

The official then proceeded to describe the scene which took place at the gate of the British Embassy: and scarcely had he finished his narrative, when the officer to whom Ramorino had entrusted the warrant for Marcellio's apprehension on the charge of murder, made his appearance in the waiting-room. What he had to tell was quickly said: another failure had been experienced—and Edgar Marcellio was evidently under the special protection of the Minister of the Interior!

"No human being can now avert the storm from bursting over Lucrezia's head!" said Ramorino to himself, when having dismissed the two police-officials, he began to retrace his way back to the apartment where he had left her. "And let it burst! What matters it now to me? Am I not ruined? is not my own destruction inevitable? have I not plunged myself into a vortex whence there is no possible redemption? But Ah! there is a ring at the gate! Perhaps it is some fresh intelligence of evil? It were madness on my part to suppose that any tidings of a pleasant or hopeful nature could now reach me!"

The Minister of Police lingered in the entrance-hall while a domestic went to answer the summons at the gate; and a voice which was easily recognised, inquired in a low diffident tone, "Is it possible to see his Excellency at such an hour?"

"Ah, Furlo!" ejaculated the Count. "What can he want? Has he thought better of it? does he yet purpose to lend me the money? If so, I may still be saved!"

It was indeed Furlo, the old miser, who came to seek an interview with the Count of Ramorino; and the two were quickly closeted together in the apartment where the Minister had just before received the police-officials.

"Now, keep me not a moment in suspense, Signor Furlo!" said the Count: "but tell me—is it possible that I can have the money which I require?"

"I think, my lord," responded the cautious old man, "that it is quite possible."

"Ah!" — and the Minister instantaneously breathed more freely. "But I presume that there is some security you require and which you may have perhaps thought of?—some guarantee that I may give?"

"Yes, my lord—it is so," rejoined the old man; "that is to say, if the seizure and levy have not as yet been made upon the mansion of the Marchioness of Mirano."

"No—the seizure has not yet been made!" cried the Count, who was literally palpitating from head to foot with the excitement of hope and suspense. "What are you thinking of, Furlo? Speak quickly! time is precious!"

"I will explain myself in a very few instants," said the miser. "It is true that I require some little guarantee; and this guarantee I think your Excellency will not find it difficult to give. It is a large sum which your lordship requires; but it

can be immediately forthcoming—yes, even at this hour of the night."

"And the guarantee?" ejaculated Ramorino impatiently.

"The Marchioness di Mirano possesses several magnificent pictures," said Furlo. "I am a judge of those works of art—I have seen her ladyship's pictures on one of those days when she was good enough to throw open her gallery to the public—"

"I understand you, Furlo!" interrupted the Count: "you require some of those pictures as a guarantee for the loan?"

"Exactly so," rejoined the money-lender. "I carry in my recollection some half-dozen of the pictures which I should be disposed to look upon as a sufficient security."

"And you shall have them," cried the Minister of Police: then rushing towards the bell pull, he added, "One of my domestics shall go with you."

"Not so, my lord!" interjected Furlo. "There will be levy and seizure on the entire property; and if any articles be now removed from within the walls of the Mirano mansion, it might be deemed a surreptitious removal—and the goods, if traced to my habitation, might be taken from me—yes, and what is more, I myself might get into trouble."

"Then what in the name of heaven do you mean?" demanded Ramorino. "There is evidently something in your mind. Tell me what it is! You would not be here now unless you saw the possible means of driving a bargain!"

"To speak, my lord, in a business-like manner," replied Furlo, "it is only necessary for me to observe that if your Excellency were to send to me—let us suppose in half-an-hour or an hour—and if your Excellency were to take me into some room within the walls of your mansion, and were to say to me, 'Here are some pictures on which I desire to raise a loan of so much money,'—and if I happen to have that sum of money about my person—"

"Enough! enough! I understand you, Furlo!" ejaculated the Minister of Police. "Which are the pictures you desire to hold as a security?"

The miser drew forth a pencil and a piece of paper; and after writing a few lines thereon, he presented the fragment to the Minister, saying, "If your Excellency ask me which I think the half-dozen best pictures in the Mirano mansion, I should say that they are those which I have here specified."

"Good!" said Ramorino. "Will you have the kindness to call upon me in the course of an hour?"

"Tis very late, my lord—past twelve o'clock," answered Furlo: "but nevertheless, as a matter of business I will obey your Excellency's summons."

The miser quitted the house; and the very moment that the front gate closed behind him, Ramorino summoned a confidential domestic, to whom he spoke in the following manner:—

"Take some convenient vehicle, and proceed to the Mirano mansion. Ask for the steward—and tell him that his mistress has sent for the six pictures specified in this list. The steward will not hesitate to give you the pictures at once, as he knows you belong to my household. Bring the pictures hither—"

"Where shall I put them, my lord?" inquired the domestic.

Ramorino hastily reflected that there was a spy belonging to the French Embassy watching in the street; and for anything he knew to the contrary, there might also be spies posted by the Minister of the Interior in the neighbourhood, so that the movements of Lucrezia should be effectually watched. Now, for obvious reasons, it by no means suited Ramorino that it should become known that he was receiving or making away with any of the goods contained in the Mirano mansion.

"You will not bring those pictures to the front gate at all," he said to his confidential domestic; "but you will take them round to the back entrance—you will convey them up the private staircase—and you will place them in the room which is most convenient for their reception."

"It shall be done, my lord!" and the domestic went forth from the Count's presence.

"Now," thought Ramorino to himself, with exultation in his heart, "there may yet be safety for me! Yes—the storm will be averted from myself! Would that I could save Lucrezia also, to ward off the shame that must more or less redound upon me—But no! no!" he thus suddenly interrupted himself in the current of his thoughts: "no shame need redound upon myself! May I not boldly proclaim that when I espoused Lucrezia di Mirano it was in ignorance that she was stained with crime?—yes, in ignorance that she was even suspected of it? Ah! there are yet many, many means by which my own position may possibly be rendered safe!"

Just at the moment when the Minister of Police arrived at this reassuring climax in his thoughts, there was another ring at the gate of his mansion; again he lingered to learn who might be calling at that late hour; and again he recognised the voice which was inquiring for him—for it was now the young priest Father Falconara.

"What can he require?" mentally ejaculated Ramorino. "But I will see him."

Stepping forward accordingly, the Minister of Police invited Falconara to walk into the waiting-room; and when they were there together, he inquired, "What has brought your reverence hither again this night?"

"My lord," replied Falconara, "I would fain speak to the lady that has become your wife."

"Speak to Lucrezia?" ejaculated Ramorino, surprised at the demand.

"Yes, my lord," answered Falconara solemnly; "an ecclesiastic may profuse such a request."

Ramorino hesitated for a few moments; and then suddenly making up his mind, he said, "Yes—your reverence has that claim which every priest under certain circumstances may assert. You shall see her ladyship; follow me."

The Minister of Police accordingly led the way upstairs to the apartment where he had left his bride; and opening the door, he said, "My dear Lucrezia, this excellent young ecclesiastic who just now united our hands, craves a few minutes' audience with you."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lucrezia, who, as we have already said, beheld some fresh calamity in every new circumstance, even the most trivial—but instantaneously composing herself as well as she

was able, she said, "Father Falconara is of course welcome. But you, my husband—have you nothing to communicate?" she demanded in a low whisper.

"Nothing for the present," he replied, somewhat abruptly—but likewise speaking in a low tone. "See what this young priest wants with you!"

With these words the Count of Ramorino quitted the apartment: Lucrezia and the ecclesiastic were left alone together. The lady bent her eyes earnestly and anxiously upon the pale handsome countenance of Father Falconara, as if to probe the very purposes of his soul ere he began to reveal them; and she was struck by observing that it was with an air of mingled pity, surprise, and severity, all strangely blended together, that he gazed upon her.

"What require you with me, holy father?" she asked, and her mind was tortured with the most lacerating suspense.

"Lady," said the priest, raising his right hand in a half warning, half adjuring manner, "I would beseech you to reveal all your misdeeds!—not merely to confess them unto me who am the minister of heaven, but to those who are the ministers of the earthly law!"

"What mean you?" asked Lucrezia, in a faint and almost dying tone; for she had not now the courage to play a part of indignation or defiance.

"I mean, lady," replied Falconara, "that your iniquities are great, and that they cry up to heaven itself for vengeance! I mean moreover that if I could have possibly suspected that you were the guilty being you are, I should not have ere now pronounced the marriage-benediction! For marriage is a sacrament wherein only those who stand well with heaven and their own consciences, ought to be the partakers!"

"Tell me at once what you mean, holy father?" murmured Lucrezia; "and I shall know how to answer you. Oh, do not speak to me with severity——"

"No, erring woman!" interrupted Falconara; "I speak to you with mercy and with compassion! It is my mission to absolve and to console—to pour balm into the wounds of the contrite heart, and to raise up the bruised spirit that is penitent!"

The tears trickled down Lucrezia's countenance; and it was under the influence of some irresistible feeling now powerfully excited by the young priest's words, that she sank down at his feet.

"Oh, holy father," she murmured, "I am very, very unhappy, and it would be impossible to deny that I have also been guilty of many misdeeds. And there is such kindness in your tone and look——"

"Alas, erring woman!" interrupted Father Falconara, "would that by my own wailings and sorrowings, or my own prayers and intercessions, I might be able to restore you to a state of innocence and happiness! But this may not be. Prayers must come from your own lips——"

"Good heaven, what is he saying? and what am I doing?" murmured Lucrezia, pressing her hand to her feverish brows, and wondering whether she were awake or whether she were in the midst of a dream. "Am I betraying myself?"

"Ah, lady!" responded Father Falconara, "those self-condemnatory words were not requisite

to convince me that you have indeed sinned deeply and that you have need of all heaven's mercy in order to save you from the eternal consequences of your crimes! But, Oh! in the first instance let me beseech and implore that you will render an act of justice where that justice is so imperiously due—and that you will lift from the character of an innocent man the aspersion which you have so falsely thrown upon it!"

"Enough! you are insulting me!" ejaculated Lucrezia, now completely regaining her self-possession; and she shuddered at the idea that in a moment of mental weakness she was on the very point of betraying the deep consciousness of her guilt in the presence of that young priest.

She sprang up from her kneeling posture as she interrupted him in that peremptory manner; and her cheeks appeared to be visibly flushing with indignation—but it was in reality with the feverish excitement to which her mind was wrought up.

"Erring woman," said Father Falconara solemnly, "you stand upon the brink of ruin in this world and of perdition in the next. By your conduct you compel me to speak out! You, the murderers of Giulio Paoli, have falsely accused Edgar Marcellin of the crime! You have doubtless deceived your husband, thereby inducing him to issue a warrant for the capture of an innocent person. But heaven fights on the side of justice and truth; and that warrant has not been executed. Confess therefore, lady! make timely reparation! Summon your husband into my presence, and acknowledge that you are in every sense as guilty as I proclaim you to be!"

Again was Lucrezia overpowered by her horrifying and agonising feelings:—to her morbid mind that young ecclesiastic, so pale and so handsome, seemed to be the arbiter of her destiny;—and again sinking upon her knees before him, she passionately exclaimed, "Oh, save me! save me, I beseech you!—and I will confess everything!"

"Good heavens! what is that I have heard?" exclaimed the Count of Ramorino, abruptly bursting into the room. "My wife accused as a murderess! and acknowledging the justice of the accusation! No, no! it cannot be!"—and Ramorino flung himself upon his knees by Lucrezia's side, as if he were overwhelmed with despair at the bare idea of such an aspersion falling on the head of his bride. "Speak, dearest Lucrezia! speak!" he vehemently exclaimed: "tell this holy priest that he is labouring under some cruel mistake! Oh, tell him this, I beseech you!"

So well was Ramorino playing this new part which he had suddenly assumed, that Father Falconara was more than ever convinced that he had been completely ignorant of Lucrezia's guilt until the present moment. Lucrezia herself was for an instant astonished at her husband's behaviour: but the next instant she was smitten with the idea that he was adopting this course in order to give her to understand as significantly as possible, that she was committing a fatal error by yielding to any weakness of mind or conscience in the presence of the young priest.

"Good heavens!" she ejaculated:—"I guilty of such iniquity as that!"—and she once more started up to her feet. "No—God forbid! Ramorino, I am surprised at you! Father Falconara, you have been grossly and infamously deceived!

But it is no wonder that such an accusation falling so suddenly and unexpectedly on my ear should overwhelm and paralyze me!"

"No wonder indeed!" said Ramorino; "for innocence when unjustly accused, often wears the very aspect of guilt itself. Father Falconara, I cannot permit you to address another word to my wife. You will have the goodness to follow me."

With these words the Minister of the Police hurried the ecclesiastic from the apartment; and taking him into another room, he said with a stern expression of countenance, "If you were not the priest whose lips had spoken the nuptial benediction upon our heads, I should hold you answerable for a diabolical attempt to bring down curses upon us! Besides, I feel convinced you must be labouring under some extraordinary error——"

"No, my lord," interrupted Father Falconara; "I am labouring under no error. Deeply grieved am I at the idea that you yourself should be so misled by love as to bestow your hand on a woman utterly unworthy of it——"

"By heaven, holy father!" ejaculated Ramorino, now affecting to be excited by a boiling indignation; "unless you in some sense make good your words—or at least satisfy me that you believe yourself to be speaking with due authority—I shall hold you accountable for all the wickedness of those foul calumnies which you keep on reiterating against the lady who, as you know, within the last few hours has become my wife!"

"Alas, my lord," replied Father Falconara, "the evidence is only too strong, as you will presently find to the cost of that happiness which you seem to have staked upon this marriage that I myself solemnized! I have only recently parted from Charles De Vere and Edgar Marcellin—the Minister of the Interior himself protects them——"

"Enough!" ejaculated Ramorino: "I cannot possibly hear anything more to the disparagement of my wife! But tell me, holy father," he added,—"tell me, will not you be enabled to certify, if the very worst should prove to be true—will not you be enabled to certify, I ask, that it was in complete ignorance of the true character of Lucrezia di Mirano, and utterly unsuspecting of the terrible charges which were pressing against her, that I knelt by her side when you pronounced the nuptial benediction?"

Up to this point Father Falconara had really believed that Ramorino was ignorant of Lucrezia's antecedents: but now the very question which the Count put to him, excited a suspicion in his mind. He remembered too the terms in which Charles De Vere had spoken of Ramorino when he said, "The Count is a villain, and he protects Lucrezia!" In a word, the Minister of Police had just over-reached himself in dealing with the young ecclesiastic; and the latter maintained an ominous silence.

"You do not answer me?" said Ramorino. "Of course I know that my wife is completely innocent: but still I was staggered by the earnestness with which you yourself persevered in an accusation as strange as it is terrible."

"My lord," interrupted Falconara, "I would rather not pass another opinion upon the subject. I see that it is one beset with difficulties. You will permit me to hold my peace and to retire."

"Oh, assuredly!" ejaculated Ramorino, who thought it better to take the matter with a high hand. "Good night, Father Falconara. Ah, by the bye! come to me to-morrow according to our previous appointment; and notwithstanding the terms in which you have now been speaking, I shall fulfil my promise of granting whatsoever boon you may have to claim. Good night, holy father."

Ramorino bowed the ecclesiastic out of the room; and he was retracing his way towards the apartment where Lucrezia again most anxiously awaited him, when he was accosted by the domestic to whom he had entrusted the errand to the Mirano mission.

"It is done, my lord," said the confidential dependant. "Your Excellency will admit that all possible despatch has been used?"

"Evidently so—and I am well pleased," replied the Count. "You have procured the pictures?"

"Yes, my lord. The steward at once delivered them up to me," was the response.

"And where have you placed them?" demanded Ramorino.

"In the uppermost room at the back part of the house, my lord."

"The uppermost room?" ejaculated Ramorino.

"But what was the use of that?"

"Your Excellency had me lodge the pictures in the apartment most convenient for the purpose in that part of the house," replied the domestic; "and as the uppermost room communicating with the private staircase was the only one that was empty——"

"Well, well—there is no harm done," interrupted the Minister of Police. "You may retire!"—and then, as the man withdrew, Ramorino muttered to himself, "It is only an extra flight of stairs or two for old Furlo to ascend presently in order to see the pictures—and a little additional trouble in taking them down to the vehicle which he may bring for the purpose of fetching them away."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CATASTROPHE.

LET us now return to Father Falconara, whom we left at the moment when he was bowed out of the room where his last interview had taken place with the Minister of Police. He left the house, saying to himself, "Yes, Charles De Vere was right! It is the sinful man protecting the erring woman! An identity of interests of some guilty complexion or another, must have induced them to join their hands with bonds even more powerful than those which had previously united them!"

As Father Falconara was slowly pursuing his way along the street, he met Edgar Marcellin and Charles De Vere.

"What tidings, holy father?" inquired the young Frenchman: "have you succeeded with that vile woman?"

"No," was the response. "There was an instant when I felt confident of success; but I failed!"

"She is still there?" interjected Marcellin, inquiringly.

"Yes—she is still there," rejoined the ecclesiastic. "She is evidently in a state of wild mental agitation——"

"Thank heaven, she is there!" exclaimed Marcellin. "We have seen the Minister of the Interior; and the measures which are now taken are of a decisive character. Look, holy father! see you that muffled individual gliding along on the other side of the street? And there is another!—and look! there comes another!"

"Yes. What means all this?" inquired the priest. "Are they the emissaries of justice?"

"They are officials from the Ministry of the Interior," replied Marcellin: "they are about to surround the Count of Ramorino's house. Noiselessly and stealthily they creep, because the arrest itself, though now fully resolved upon, is to be effected tranquilly and quietly—at least if Ramorino himself will so permit it. But if otherwise, then——"

"I understand," said Father Falconara: "force will be used if necessary? Alas, unhappy woman! It is impossible for her to make her peace with man! I can only pray that she may reconcile herself to heaven!"

With these words Father Falconara was moving on, when Edgar Marcellin, grasping his hand, said, "Although you failed to obtain from that vile woman's lips the confession which would have at once exonerated my character, yet let me proffer the assurance of my sincerest gratitude for the kind interest you have displayed on my behalf."

Father Falconara expressed due acknowledgments for the courteous language thus held towards him; and he pursued his way in one direction, while Edgar Marcellin and Charles De Vere continued their own route in another.

The two young gentlemen quickly arrived at the gate of Ramorino's private residence; and one of the muffled individuals to whom we have so recently alluded, glided towards them.

"It is all right," said Marcellin. "She is there!"

The individual spoke not a word, but glided away again; and De Vere now rang at the gate. The summons was immediately answered by a lacquey; and Charles said, "We wish to speak to his Excellency the Count of Ramorino."

"What names shall I bear to his lordship?" inquired the domestic.

"It is unnecessary to mention any names," replied Charles. "Say simply that two gentlemen desire to see his Excellency on most important business. Ah! when I bethink me, you may add, if you like, that one comes from the French Embassy and the other from the English."

The domestic conducted the two young gentlemen into the waiting-room where the Count of Ramorino had already seen so many persons on this particular evening.

In the meanwhile Ramorino had rejoined Lucrezia after having parted from Father Falconara; and he told her of the failure of his endeavours to effect the promised arrests,—a circumstance which she had already more than half conjectured from an observation which had fallen from the lips of Father Falconara. The Count did not think it worth while to mention that he had sent for the pictures, or that he expected Furlo to supply him with the funds which should ensure his own safety;

he fancied it was better under the circumstances to avoid incurring the imputation of selfishly looking after his own interests. In respect to his conduct a quarter of an hour back in the presence of Father Falconara, he declared that it was only for the purpose of preventing Lucrezia from irredeemably compromising herself; and the explanation seemed as a matter of course so natural that she did not for a moment suspect how in this instance also he had been studying to make his own interests assort with the probable flow of events.

But now there was a wild and passionate outburst of grief, and lamentation, and entreaty on Lucrezia's part. What was she to do? what would Ramorino advise? to what extent could he protect her? Should she remain there? or should she return to her own mansion, barricade the doors, and defy the officers of justice with the warrants of levy and seizure? Were there no means of averting the storm? or had the thunder-cloud gathered so completely and descended so low above their heads that it must speedily burst? All these questions were hurriedly put in almost as many seconds only as it has taken us minutes to record them. And not only hurriedly put were those questions, but frantically and with feverish anxiety—with all the agony of poignant suspense—with a tightening at the heart, a suffocation at the throat, and fire in the brain! And how looked Lucrezia now?—was she the same exquisitely beautiful woman as ever? No!—grief and agony of mind had already in the space of a few hours done much to mar her natural loveliness. Her face was haggard—her features had veritably the careworn appearance of whole years stamped upon them! Her eyes seemed sunken and hollow; her lips were ashy white; and the half-exposed bosom, which was wont to swell with the glow of love's transports, was now palpitating with the volcaino bell that raged beneath. She could scarcely realize the horror of her position: she could scarcely fancy that it was otherwise than a hideous dream. Yet her mind was in a terrible state of activity at the time: she remembered a thousand things which were only more or less remotely connected with her degradation and her appalling danger. She recollected, for instance, how, scarcely a year back, she had smilingly and confidently assured Ciprina how utterly impossible it was that she could ever imitate the crimes of her prototype in beauty, Lucrezia Borgia; and yet there she was, steeped to the lips in iniquity, and hovering upon the precipice into which her own tremendous guilt, like a huge phantom from pandemonium, seemed ready to plunge her! Nor less did the wretched woman think how she, so lately the courted and admired—she, the object of so much adoration,—she, who was renowned alike for her beauty and her wealth,—she, who even in these modern times might have inspired a whole legion of gallant suitors with the chivalrous devotion of past ages,—yes, how *she*, the once brilliant Lucrezia, had now fallen so very, very low! It was enough to make her dash her head against a wall or seize a weapon for the purpose of committing suicide—or even drop down and give up the ghost beneath the weight of such intolerable calamities! And therefore it was in a voice of rending anguish, and with

a countenance whereon all the tortures of a doomed one were depicted, that she implored her husband to save her, or to counsel her how she might save herself if he were no longer able to assist her!

Ramorino knew not how to reply to the passionate queries she had put to him: or rather we ought to say that he had a negative answer for every one of them, and was completely bewildered how to suggest anything in their place. She must not leave his house, because she was watched. She must not return to her own home, because such a step would only be precipitating her arrest. She must not go thither and barricade the doors, because the officials of the Minister of the Interior would break down the portals for the purpose of capturing her; or the bailiffs of the Treasury would do the same for the purpose of levying the seizure. As for Ramorino himself, his own power had suddenly appeared to come to an end: the men at whose beck and word the whole springs of the Tuscan police could be put in motion, was now paralysed by a combination of circumstances which he could scarcely have foreseen and against which he could not struggle. All was bewilderment, agitation, confusion, and uncertainty on the part of those two beings who had only been married a few hours. Good heavens! what a honeymoon was succeeding that bridal! It was now close upon one o'clock in the morning; and all idea of retiring to rest was out of the question. With a palatial residence of her own in that fair city of Florence—with a villa in the loveliest part of Arno's delightful valley—with a chateau in the country—and with the right to call her husband's own residence *her home*, Lucrezia nevertheless felt as if there were no place where she might lay her head! Oh, how she wrung her hands! how she anathematized the day on which she had purchased that picture of Lucrezia Borgia which had appeared to act as an evil genius that she was installing beneath her roof! Oh, and how she likewise cursed the hour when she had fallen in with Ciprina; for it seemed as if her intimacy with that young lady had likewise tended by a variety of means to bring her ill-luck of every description!

Now, from the moment that her husband rejoined her after his last interview with Father Falconara, until that when he was presently summoned away again, only a quarter of an hour elapsed; and yet during that quarter of an hour every anguish and agony which the mind and the soul could know, were endured by the wretched Lucrezia! We have heard of the hair of afflicted persons turning grey in a single night; it was a marvel that in the quarter of an hour of which we are speaking, the snows of a sudden old age were not shed upon the golden auburn hair of Lucrezia. As for Ramorino, he would have saved her if he could. He would have saved her—even though he now knew her to be beggared, because he felt that it was better to remove her, if possible, from a scene where, if she remained, destruction and shame were her inevitable portion! And though he had endeavoured to take precautions to prevent any of that shame from redounding upon himself, yet he could not possibly feel confident that the attempt would be ultimately crowned with success. In a word, there were moments when the Minister of Police—hitherto so coldly calm, so emotionless, and so phlegmatic in all his proceedings—felt as if

he were losing his head in the midst of the distracting circumstances that now environed him.

But let us resume the thread of our narrative. We have said that it was not long before the Count of Ramorino was again called away from Lucrezia. The door opened—a domestic appeared—and while Lucrezia turned aside to conceal her emotions, the Count muttered impatiently, "What, again? Fresh visitors?"

"If you please, my lord," said the lacquey, "two gentlemen desire to see your Excellency."

"Two gentlemen? Who are they?" demanded Ramorino.

"They say that it is unnecessary to give their names, my lord: and they bade me state that one comes from the English Embassy and one from the French."

"Ah!" ejaculated the Count: and Lucrezia at the same moment quickly turned her head towards the domestic, for the same suspicion had simultaneously smitten herself and her husband.

"Two young gentlemen—both slender and handsome," continued the servant, who thought a further description was needed. "Dark hair and eyes—"

"Enough! I will come," said Ramorino: and the domestic withdrew.

"Marcellin and De Vere!" said Lucrezia; "there can be no doubt of it! What does this mean? Does it bode good? or does it bode evil? Oh! is the crisis coming?"—and she shivered from head to foot.

"It may be something more favourable than we suppose," said the Count; "or else why should they come hither? But I will go and see."

"For heaven's sake return soon! come back speedily, I conjure you!" cried Lucrezia. "Oh, my God! what agonies of suspense shall I endure in the meantime! What if the very worst be about to happen!"

A thought struck Ramorino. He knew that the Minister of the Interior would be willing to show all possible courtesy towards a colleague, and that it would only be as a last resource or under very urgent circumstances that the arrest of any one would be ordered to take place in his (Ramorino's) house. It therefore occurred to him that the visit of De Vere and Marcellin might be for the actual purpose of bringing matters to a prompt, yet quiet and noiseless issue. In a word, he penetrated the real truth on the point.

"Now, this may mean something of importance—or it may mean nothing of any consequence," said Ramorino hastily: "and yet it is not likely to be the latter!"

"Suppose then it is the former," cried the wretched Lucrezia,—"suppose that the crisis is come,—can you not arrest them?"

"No, no—I dare not under existing circumstances!" replied the Count impatiently. "But listen to me! I must take measures for your safety! Look! you see the wire of this bell? It passes up the angle of the room—"

"Yes, yes. What then?" demanded Lucrezia, with feverish impatience.

"It communicates from the room below with a chamber at the top of the house. You could not hear the bell ring; but you might see the wire

move. Watch it well! If there be danger I will pull it. Then do you instantaneously take the alarm—"

"Yes, yes! But whither shall I go? and what shall I do?" asked Lucrezia.

"Listen to me. Hasten to the end of the passage—open the door to the right—it will bring you upon the landing of a private staircase. Ascend that staircase—and on reaching the top you will see the means of passing out on the roof of the house. Keep along the roof as if you were seeking the lower end of the street; and enter one of the attic windows in the fourth house from hence. Mind, the fourth house! It belongs to a faithful officer of mine; and he will at least keep you concealed and in safety until measures can be adopted to ensure your secret departure from Florence. Now, will you do this in case of need? will you follow all my instructions?"

"Oh, yes! yes!" exclaimed Lucrezia. "Good heavens! what would I not do to avoid the other fate that may possibly be in store for me?"

"Then watch well the wire," said Ramorino; "and for heaven's sake sustain your presence of mind!—for on that everything may now possibly depend!"

Having thus spoken, the Minister of Police hastened out of the apartment; and as he descended to the waiting-room, he composed his looks into a demeanour of sedate and reserved courtesy, which may be denominated the "official air" he was wont to assume on most occasions. On entering the waiting-room, he bowed to the two young gentlemen; and appearing to be struck by the visage of one of them, he said in a somewhat severe voice, "Surely you must be M. Marcellin, whom I met occasionally last winter in the saloons of Florentine society?"

"I am that same M. Marcellin, my lord," replied Edgar, with a tone and look of calm dignity,—that same M. Marcellin against whom you have dared to issue a warrant for a crime which makes my blood curdle to think of it, and then boil to be accused of it!"

"And I, my lord," said Charles De Vere, now stepping forward in his turn, while Marcellin retreated a pace or two, "am that English gentleman who was carried off to Bagno by your Excellency's police-agents,—the same concerning whom your lordship was this evening inquiring so very earnestly, and with every appearance of anxiety, at the hotel and likewise at the British Embassy."

"And to what circumstance, gentlemen," inquired Ramorino, who lost not his presence of mind, but who remained coldly calm, "am I indebted for the visit that you now pay me at one o'clock in the morning?"

"Our object will be soon explained," said Charles De Vere, who now acted as spokesman. "A warrant has been issued for the arrest of a lady lately bearing the name of the Marchioness di Mirano, but who, I presume, must now be known as the Marchioness or Countess of Ramorino."

"A warrant against that lady, sir!" said the Minister: but instantaneously recollecting himself, he saw that it was ridiculous to affect ignorance of the circumstance—and he therefore went on to observe in the same cold tone as at first,



"Yes, I know it. A priest came hither ere now and said so. Proceed, sir."

"That lady is beneath this roof," continued our hero; "and the house is surrounded by the agents of the Minister of the Interior."

"Proceed," said Ramorino, still in the same cold level tone as before.

"His Excellency the Minister of the Interior," resumed De Vere, "is naturally most anxious to avoid any discourteous proceeding towards your lordship as one of his colleagues in the Tuscan Administration. Therefore, it is by his Excellency's express desire that M. Marcellin and myself now wait upon you, to demand that Lucrezia di Mirano, *alias* di Ramorino, may be at once given into the custody of an officer who waits outside."

"Indeed, gentlemen," said Ramorino, "if I thought it was true that the lady who has become my wife were capable of the iniquities which

have been attributed to her, I should unhesitatingly——"

"It is true, my lord!" said Marcellin vehemently: "and if you do not already know it, 'tis high time that you should be thoroughly enlightened on that head! We do not mean to waste another moment here! Surrender up that vile woman," added the young Frenchman, who was now terribly excited,—"the infamous creature who has dared to accuse me of her own horrid crime!—or else we will give a certain signal that has been agreed upon, and your house will be invaded by your colleague's officials!"

"In what I am about to do, gentlemen," said Ramorino, "I beg you to understand that I am not awayed by any threats or heated language, but merely by a sense of justice. Be seated for a few moments, and you shall have your own way."

With these words, the Minister of Police advanced towards a bell-cord—and he pulled it.

"Let me again request you to be seated," he said, now speaking with an air of mournfulness; "and everything shall be managed in as tranquil and noiseless a manner as possible."

In the meanwhile Lucrezia had passed a few minutes of indescribable agony in the apartment precisely overhead. It was an anguish of suspense to which even the horrors of the rack itself might be deemed a bed of roses!—it was a succession of pangs to which the excruciation of impalement was but as a zephyr to a storm! And though she was in this frightful condition of uncertainty, yet was there the sure foreboding in her mind that something dreadful was about to happen; so that she made her preparations for the worst. She put on her bonnet and shawl; and she stood watching the wire of the bell with all that hideous, poignant, lincinating suspense which we have just been endeavouring to describe. Ah! was the wire already vibrating? No! 'twas a false alarm! But now did her eyes deceive her? Yes! again it was an illusion of the fevered fancy! She passed her hand rapidly across her eyes; and now she looked again. Holy saints! *this time* it was no mistake!—no illusion! The wire was drawn down visibly—it grated against the wainscot in that corner of the apartment—and then it flew upward with a strong recoil: it had evidently been pulled hard and suffered to escape suddenly, so that the signal should be conveyed beyond the possibility of error.

Oh! now there was no alternative but to depart—to fly!—yes, and with all possible speed. Lucrezia glided towards the door—opened it noiselessly—and as quickly and as airily did she thread the passage. She opened the right hand door at the end: it communicated with the landing—and she sprang up the narrow staircase that was now before her. She gained the top; and there she beheld a glass-door that looked upon the leads of the house. She opened it and stepped forth. The stars were shining brightly over-head: silence and that silvery light surrounded her. A glance flung all around, showed her in which direction she was to proceed; for she beheld the spires and towers of several churches the situations of which were completely familiar to her. Oh! the excitement of this escape would have been enhanced up to the very point of madness itself, were it not that it seemed as if she were suddenly breathing the fresh air of freedom after a species of captivity for about six mortal hours in the apartment below!

She continued her way along the leads; and now she reached an attic-window which projected forth as it were from a slanting part of the roof. She must pass in front of this window; and the feat was somewhat a dangerous one, for it was little that separated her from the edge of the dizzy abyss. She however summoned all her courage to her aid: she knew that she never in her life needed it more than at this present moment. The starlight shone full upon the window; and as Lucrezia was passing it, she glanced into the room to which it belonged. Just heaven! why did she give that terrific start? and why did that wild cry peal forth from her lips? It was because inside that room—indeed close to the window, and facing it as it were, so that the silver lustre of the heavens shone full upon it,—was the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia!

A fearful diaziness seized upon the brain of Lucrezia: it whirled in horrible confusion. Everything around then appeared suddenly to be growing up to a gigantic size,—attic-windows and chimneys, church-towers and steeples!—it was a phantasmagoria, stupendous and terrible, in which she was involved! And amidst it all the face of Lucrezia Borgia seemed to be gazing upon her!—it was the only object that was clear amidst the countless images that were thronging confusedly and bewilderingly upon her brain. She tottered—and then the horrible consciousness smote her that she was staggering to the very verge of the abyss! The unhappy wretch! she all in a moment became aware that she was losing her footing on that giddy height! With a desperate effort she strove to recover herself—but she could not!—a fearful shriek pealed from her lips—and down she fell!

For a few instants the wild screams of Lucrezia di Mirano rent the air; and all the inhabitants of that district of Florence were suddenly startled and horrified by the terrific sounds. The house was so situated that the portion of the roof where Lucrezia had tried to make her way towards the adjacent dwellings, and whence she had fallen, was concealed from the view of those who might happen to be in any of the neighbouring streets; and thus the agents of the Minister of the Interior, who had been stealthily gathering in the neighbourhood of Ramorino's private residence, suspected not that the object of their search had been endeavouring to escape from them. But when these pealing shrieks rang through the air, the agents to whom we have just alluded thundered at the gates of several houses in that quarter—sprang upon the garden-walls—and made rapid researches in every direction, to ascertain what had happened and where. The neighbours came forth from their dwellings, most of them having been startled from their slumbers; and thus the half-clad forms of men and women were seen huddled together at the street-doors, or grouped upon balconies, all wondering what could possibly have happened.

But let us again look into the room where we left the Minister of Police with Charles De Vere and Edgar Marcellin. The Minister had pulled the bell-wire, and the two young men naturally fancied that it was to command the attendance of a servant for the purpose of summoning Lucrezia di Mirano to that apartment. A few minutes elapsed, during which a profound silence reigned in the room—Charles and Edgar anxiously awaiting the presence of the guilty woman,—the Count of Ramorino standing before the fire, with his back towards his two visitors, so that his countenance was concealed from them.

"Your summons is not answered, my lord," Charles De Vere at length said.

"My attendants must be asleep!" ejaculated Ramorino, turning away from the fire-place. "And it is not astonishing—for the night is far advanced!"

"Ah! what is that?" cried De Vere. "A shriek!"

"Hush!" said Marcellin: and then there were a few moments of breathless suspense. "Yes! a scream!" ejaculated Edgar.

"Another! and another!" exclaimed Charles.

"Good God! what can have happened?" cried the Count of Ramorino; though at the instant he was smitten with a horrible idea as to the nature of the catastrophe that might have taken place.

He rushed forth from the room, the young men closely following him: he sped into the court-yard of his house, just at the instant when some of the agents of the Minister of the Interior were springing over the wall.

Ejaculations of horror burst from the lips of Edgar and Charles De Vere, as they beheld a female form lying, like a huddled-up heap or shapeless mass of garments, on the pavement, which was stained with blood. But with another glance Edgar Marcellin recognised those luxuriant tresses of golden auburn hair; and he cried, "'Tis she! 'tis the wretched Lucrezia!"

Ramorino raised up that form, at the same time calling vehemently for surgical assistance to be sent for. But at the first moment he had well known that it was too late,—though as a matter of course he affected to be ignorant of the circumstances attending Lucrezia's death. A medical man was quickly on the spot, but life was extinct.

Edgar Marcellin and Charles De Vere went away from the private residence of Count Ramorino. They called at Signor Petroro's, and informed Paoli of what had happened: they thence proceeded to the hotel where Ciprina had established her quarters in company with the Hardress family; and on learning from a domestic that the young lady was still sitting up, Charles De Vere penned a few lines which he requested might be given to her at once, but he would not disturb her at that late hour further than by means of this missive. The two young gentlemen then separated, and repaired respectively to the French and English Embassies—each with a strong and awful impression upon his mind of the fearful tragedy which had closed the career of Lucrezia di Mirano.

At the very time when the rumour was spreading throughout the neighbourhood of Ramorino's private residence, that something terrible had happened there, old Furlo the miser was creeping along the street, having about his person the sum he had agreed to advance upon the security of the pictures. He inquired what was the cause of the excitement which prevailed in the district; but all he could learn was that an accident of a dreadful nature had happened somewhere in the neighbourhood—but where it was no one could as yet tell. Furlo pursued his way to the back entrance of Count Ramorino's abode: the door had just been burst open by one of the agents of the Minister of the Interior—and the old miser passed in. He was half inclined to retreat: he thought there must be something wrong in connexion with Ramorino or his affairs; but curiosity induced him to pursue his way. He reached the court-yard just as the form of a woman was being borne into the house.

"What is the matter?" demanded Furlo of a person who was now near to him. "Was that a dead body?"

"Yes," replied the man, who was one of the agents of the Minister of the Interior: "it is the corpse of the Marchioness di Mirano, who has just committed suicide, it is supposed, by throwing herself from a window, or else she was making her escape along the top of the house. But we shall know all about it presently."

"At all events she is dead," observed the miser

"And her property?"

"All confiscated," was the reply. "The seizure is doubtless made by this time—for some of my comrades have gone about it."

"Well, it is altogether a bad business," said the old man; and he was turning to leave the court-yard when some one hastened towards him and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

It was the Minister of Police; and in a low deep voice he said, "Ah! you are here, my friend! Stop a few moments, and I shall be prepared to attend to you."

"But the Marchioness is dead!" replied the old man.

"It matters nothing, Furlo," rejoined Ramorino earnestly, as he drew the miser a little further aside. "The pictures are here——"

"But the seizure is made by this time at the Mirano mansion," interjected the old man, "and the confiscation holds good upon all the property of the deceased Marchioness wheresoever it may be found."

"No one will know where the pictures are!" ejaculated Ramorino vehemently. "I will screen and protect you!"

"I really begin to be afraid, my lord," rejoined the old man, "that you will find it somewhat difficult to screen and protect yourself. I do not like the business—I will have nothing to do with it—and I bid your lordship farewell."

Thus speaking, Furlo hurried away; and Ramorino seeing his last hope destroyed, dashed his hand frantically against his forehead, exclaiming to himself, "Then I am lost! I am lost!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FLORIBEL AND EDGAR.

It was in the evening of the day following that night of memorable adventures the recital of which has occupied so many chapters. Ciprina was seated alone at the hotel where she had taken up her quarters; she was in an elegant evening toilet, and she looked exceedingly beautiful. There was a certain agitation in her manner—a nervous restlessness as she glanced frequently towards the door, as if she expected some one who did not make his appearance. At length the door was thrown open, and a waiter announced M. Marcellin.

The young Frenchman was dressed in full evening costume; and he looked remarkably handsome. In fact it struck Ciprina the instant he stood in her presence, that he had never seemed to greater advantage; while on the other hand a similar thought smote the young gentleman in reference to the lady herself. It was with a friendly fervour that he grasped her hand: he felt that it trembled in his own—for an instant he flung a look of anxious and earnest scrutiny upon her; and then conducting her to a seat, he placed himself by her side.

"I could not get away earlier from the English Embassy," said Marcellin. "It was a splendid entertainment! Of course you know that the

Hardress family were there? I indeed, they are still there, for the ball is now commencing."

"And you have left that scene of gaiety on my account, M. Marcellin?" said Ciprina, half bitterly, half tenderly. "I am very sorry that you should have done so. Of course I could not expect an invitation to the Embassy,—I who have to deplore a reputation which is tarnished if not altogether ruined!"

"Do not speak in such a strain as this, Ciprina!" interrupted Marcellin. "As a matter of course, I redeemed my promise by stealing away from the entertainment as soon as I could, and coming hither to see you. Was it not my duty? do I not owe you my life? Think you that I can ever forget the ministering care I received at your hands,—and how your own life was risked while thus tending me beneath the roof of that vile woman who is now no more! But you wear a singular look this evening, Ciprina!" continued the young Frenchman: and he himself now experienced certain feelings of uneasiness, for he felt that the time was at hand when he must come to a full explanation with the young lady.

"Well," she ejaculated, her countenance suddenly clearing up, and its expression becoming joyous and unrestrained as was its wont, "since you have come on purpose to see me, and have torn yourself away from such pleasant society, I must not seem dull or miserable in your presence! But do give me some details of to-day's investigation?"

"Ah! I had almost forgotten," replied Marcellin, "that I had not seen you since ten o'clock this morning."

"And then you were on your way," said Ciprina, "to the Judge's residence; and I told you that when next we met, I felt confident I should be enabled to congratulate you on your character being fully cleared up."

"Yes! and you may congratulate me, my dear Ciprina," exclaimed Edgar; "for there exists not the breath of a suspicion against me!"

"Oh! I do congratulate you, M. Marcellin!—most sincerely! most sincerely!" repeated the young lady, with a tone of fervour.

"Twice you have called me *M. Marcellin* within these five minutes," observed Edgar; "may I ask you why you address me in these formal terms?"

"'Tis nothing! I will tell you presently!" responded the young lady. "But pray give me some description of the day's proceedings. You really seem to forget that I was not present at the investigation, and that I knew nothing more of it than what rumour has circulated. I however presume that it must have lasted until a late hour; or else either you or Mr. De Vere would have called, if only for a moment, to give me a few details."

"It lasted until five o'clock, Ciprina," interjected Marcellin; "and then De Vere and myself had only just time to perform our toilets for the banquet which was to take place. I told you in the morning that I thought this might possibly be the case—and that if I could not come to you before the dinner, I would be sure to be with you in the evening. So here I am, faithful to my pledge, and ready to give you the fullest details of everything which took place before the Judge."

"Proceed," said Ciprina; "for, as you may

easily suppose, I am *still* much interested in everything which is connected with the wondrous melodrama that has now drawn to an end."

"It was a sort of private investigation," resumed Edgar, "and took place in private apartments, and not in a court of justice itself. I repeated to the Judge all that I had heard from the lips of Lisetta in England; and then I explained how it was that I came to Florence for the purpose of bringing home the foul crime of Giulio's murder to its authress. Bernardo the groom was examined; and he deposed to the fact that the Marchioness di Mirano went out upon her steed in a secret and stealthy manner, and dressed in masculine costume, on that very evening of Giulio's assassination. The costume was produced before the Judge, and Bernardo identified it as the same which the Marchioness wore on the occasion referred to. In the breast-pocket of the surtout coat, some grains of gunpowder were discovered. I likewise produced the pistol which Lisetta had marked—and the flask of gunpowder, the top of which had come off when it had been hurriedly tossed into the drawer. And then I proceeded to relate how the Marchioness had stabbed me, and how I was indebted to you for the salvation of my life. I failed not to describe how the Marchioness sought to take us both off by poison:—in a word, I told the Judge everything! Antonia gave her evidence in respect to the concluding scenes which had occurred at the Mirano mansion; and Signor Paoli likewise gave his own testimony."

"Did he mention how he flung the purse through the window of the ball-room?" inquired Ciprina.

"Neither he, nor myself, nor any one who was examined," responded Marcellin, "omitted a single detail which in any way bore upon the case. Charles De Vere was equally candid in describing how he was carried away into captivity."

"Ah! then, doubtless the Count of Ramorino is seriously compromised?" exclaimed Ciprina.

"Most seriously," rejoined Marcellin. "You may depend upon it I did not spare him; for I did not forget how he caused yourself and De Vere to be carried off, nor how he issued a warrant for murder against myself. Well, then, we proved him to be an accomplice of the Marchioness di Mirano's to a certain extent: we showed by circumstantial evidence that it could have been only at the instigation of the Marchioness he had ordered Paoli to leave Tuscany; while the production of the billet which he had written to Lucrezia in the Vale of Arno, stating how you and your companion at the time had been borne away into imprisonment—"

"Ah! that letter was criminatory indeed!" ejaculated Ciprina. "But, by the bye, I forgot to ask whether the Count of Ramorino was present during the investigation?"

"Yes," replied Marcellin. "It was by the Grand Duke's own special order that he attended the inquiry. The French and English Ambassadors were also present. But in respect to Ramorino, the old proverb was fulfilled, which says that it never rains but it pours: for not merely did he stand accused of having exercised his power as a Minister for the most despotic and infamous purposes, but it was represented by the steward of

the late Marchioness that he had surreptitiously and dishonestly obtained possession of certain valuable pictures which were in the Mirano mansion, and that this he did last night at a time when it is proved that he knew there were warrants of arrest and confiscation in the hands of the authorities for the seizure of the person and the property of the woman whom he had just privately married. But this is not all! It is likewise whispered that Ramorino is a defaulter in respect to the Government moneys; and if this be the case, it will assuredly go very hard with him."

"And no one will pity him!" interjected Ciprina. "But tell me, M. Marcellin——"

"Ah! M. Marcellin again?" ejaculated the young Frenchman, in a tone of reproach.

"Tell me," continued Ciprina, taking no heed of the interruption, "was any wonder expressed that I did not go forward to give my evidence before the Judge?"

"No," answered Edgar; "because in respect to the attempt at poisoning on the part of the Marchioness, there was the statement to which you had appended your signature, and which was attested by the British Envoy. As for all the other details that you might have given in evidence, they were equally well known to me, and my narrative sufficed. Besides, the Judge evidently appreciated the delicacy of your position,—having lived with the Marchioness so long a time as you had done—having been so intimate with her——"

"Well," interposed Ciprina, "I am glad that I escaped an ordeal which certainly would have been more or less painful for me. But what else have you to relate?"

"I think that I have told you all," responded Marcellin,—“unless I ought to add that the Judge summed up all the particulars in the most lucid manner; and in conclusion he pronounced the late Marchioness of Mirano to have been guilty of an attempt to poison yourself and me, and guilty also of the murder of Giulio Paoli. Thus was I myself honourably acquitted—even if it could be said that my own reputation was ever really at stake upon the point; for it is scarcely possible that Ramorino himself could have believed me guilty when he issued the warrant for my arrest."

"And thus the judicial investigation is at an end?" said Ciprina. "But has anything been done with Ramorino?"

"The Judge had no power to pronounce any sentence upon a Minister," rejoined Marcellin: "for that Minister is indeed of higher rank than the Judge himself. But doubtless the Grand Duke will visit Ramorino with his severest displeasure. Ah! I forgot to mention, Ciprina, that the steward of the Mirano mansion received an order to deliver up to you whatsoever effects may be yours within the walls of that dwelling."

"And in reference to the death of the Marchioness," inquired Ciprina, "has any fresh light been shed upon it?"

"Judge for yourself," exclaimed Edgar, "when you hear what I am about to tell you! It is beyond all doubt that she was endeavouring to escape by the roof at the time she met her death; for some of the agents of the Minister of the Interior who forced their way into Ramorino's house, discovered a door open leading upon the leads. And what is most singular is that amongst

the pictures which Ramorino surreptitiously obtained from the Mirano mansion, was the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Ciprina. "I feel a sort of superstitious awe when you mention the name of that picture: for it always seemed to have an ominous association with the Marchioness. Ah! many, many things do I now recall to my mind, which she said to me on various occasions in connexion with that portrait! But what were you about to tell me?"

"That it may probably have been one of the last objects on which her eyes glanced in this life; for it must have faced her, so to speak, when she was upon the leads!—she must have seen it through a window!"

"And who can tell," interjected Ciprina, "but that a sudden horror—a superstitious terror perhaps—may have seized upon the wretched woman; and—and——But Oh, no!" exclaimed the young lady, thus suddenly interrupting herself, and placing her hands before her eyes; "I cannot suffer my imagination to look upon anything so dreadful! Let us speak of something else. Where is Mr. De Vere?"

"He is at the Ambassador's," replied Marcellin. "But just now you said that you had something to tell me——"

"I remember," ejaculated Ciprina, "I told you that I would explain wherefore I addressed you as M. Marcellin, and not in the same familiar terms as heretofore. Do you remember that night when Charles De Vere was to come stealthily to the Mirano mansion—you lay in bed—I was seated by the side of the couch—and you gave a species of vague, dreamy, and unconscious expression to your thoughts—and you spoke of Agnes, the Beauty of Sidney Villa—and you said that you had heard of her cousin Floribel——"

"Oh!" ejaculated Marcellin, as a sudden suspicion struck him. "Good heavens! is it possible? You, Ciprina—you——"

"Yes," she responded in a tremulous voice; "I am Floribel Liester! Oh, you must have sooner or later learnt it from the Hardress family; for doubtless you are now acquainted with them!"

"And you are Floribel Liester!" said Marcellin, still under the effect of the sudden amazement which had seized upon him. "Oh! Corinna said——"

But he stopped suddenly short, and a scarlet glow mantled upon his cheeks. It was now Floribel's turn to start; and she gazed earnestly upon his countenance, the colour at the same time coming and going in rapid transitions upon her own cheeks.

"That name of Corinna!" she said, at length breaking silence, and speaking in a low tremulous voice,—“it is not the first time you have mentioned it with emotion! No! on that very same occasion to which I just now referred—when you were unconsciously giving a dreamy expression to the ideas that were vaguely hovering in your mind,—you spoke of Corinna! you said that she was beautiful! Ah, now I comprehend it all! You love her! you love her!"

"Listen to me, Floribel!—for by this name I must now call you," said Edgar Marcellin; "and let there be the completest frankness and candour between us."

"Yes—speak!" said the young lady; "and it shall indeed be with candour and frankness that you will receive from my lips the answer to whatsoever you may be about to say!"

"I owe you a debt of incalculable gratitude, Floribel," resumed Edgar: "you saved my life more than once,—you saved me from the effects of the wound dealt by the dagger of the Marchioness—you saved me from the poison—you saved me altogether from the fatal malignity of her vengeance! It is therefore a life which I owe you! That life is at your disposal;—and if it be your will, it must be devoted to you!"

"Do you mean me to understand, Edgar," she asked in a tremulous voice, and now again addressing him by his Christian name,—"do you mean me to understand that you would make every possible sacrifice for my sake?"

"Yes—every possible sacrifice!" answered the young Frenchman, with fervid emphasis.

"Yet you love Corinna? Oh, I am sure that you love her!" exclaimed Floribel. "And you would renounce your love for her? Oh! have you not said that she was beautiful—"

"Do not speak to me of another!" interrupted Marcellin. "I am bound body and soul unto you!"

The young lady's beautifully symmetrical form trembled throughout, and a quick flush passed over her countenance, while a flood of joyous light was also poured into her handsome eyes; so that it seemed as if this were a moment of profound and blissful triumph for her.

"And you would wed me?" she said: "you would conduct me to the altar?"

"Yes—I will make you my wife," answered Edgar.

"Your wife? And yet you know enough of me," said Floribel, "to be aware that I am not fit to become the wife of an honourable gentleman! You could not introduce me into the circles where you move—you would be ashamed of me—"

"With such calculations as these I have nothing to do, Floribel," replied Marcellin. "I only think of you as one who saved my life—who bent over me with an unswerving devotion when I lay stretched, weak, feeble, and helpless, upon a sick couch, and when I had no other friend near me but you! I think of you only as one who displayed the most magnanimous generosity towards me, even to the extent of perilling your own life!—suffering persecution and captivity—and when meeting me again, breathing not a syllable of regret or reproach that you should have made your own interests identical with those of one who seemed to bring only misfortune upon your head! But, Ah! you weep, Floribel! Oh, you are weeping!"

The tears were indeed trickling down the cheeks of the young lady; but she quickly dashed them away—and she said, "No, Edgar—no! I cannot suffer myself any longer to be beguiled by this delicious dream! Oh, I will not hesitate to confess that I love you as never before have I loved—and that there was even a time when I used to bend over you and indulge in delightful visions!—But no, no!" she abruptly exclaimed, "it must not be! Not for worlds, Edgar, would I suffer your happiness to be shipwrecked on the rock of my selfishness! I did not save your life to render it

misérable! Heaven forbid! Oh, you are generous and magnanimous! you are everything great and noble, as I believed you to be! Be happy, therefore, with your Corinna!—be happy with her—for she is pure and chaste, and she is fitted to become the wife of an honourable man! And now not another syllable of remonstrance, Edgar! not a word from your lips in the hope of diverting me from the decision which I have just given!"

"It is you who are noble and magnanimous, Floribel!" exclaimed Marcellin, throwing himself upon his knees at her feet. "Your decision shall be respected! But permit me as a brother might deal with a sister, to take this hand and press it to my lips in fervid gratitude! Floribel, I shall never forget you! Your welfare will be ever dear to me—and, Oh! suffer me to become the medium of communication between yourself and Agnes! Let me beseech you to return to your cousin, who will receive you with open arms—"

"No—never!" ejaculated Floribel. "Rise, Edgar—rise!" and she compelled him to quit the kneeling posture which he had assumed at her feet. "Speak to me no more on that subject!—but if you really entertain any regard for my happiness and any consideration for my welfare, you will retain the seal of silence upon your lips in respect to me when next you see my cousin Agnes. For you will doubtless return to England soon,—you will be anxious to see your Corinna, and to tell her that the foul murder of her brother is as far avenged that the murderess ceases to exist. But mention not my name to Agnes, I conjure you! She believes that I am in some strict seclusion—that I have become virtuous again—she is tranquillized about her erring cousin! These are the very words which came from your own lips on an occasion to which I have already more than once referred;—and, Oh! I beseech you, Edgar, destroy not the impression which rests upon the mind of the much-loved Agnes!"

"Not for worlds, Floribel!" ejaculated Marcellin. "But tell me, what are your plans? what course do you purpose to follow?"

"I know not at present," she replied; "but to you I am about to say farewell. We must meet no more; and I beseech you not to visit me again. May you be happy, Edgar!—this is now the wish that is uppermost in my heart!"

Floribel proffered him her hand: he pressed it to his lips—the tears came into his eyes; but suddenly that beautiful hand was withdrawn from his own—and Floribel glided away, disappearing by a door leading into an adjacent apartment.

A few minutes afterwards Edgar Marcellin was leaving the hotel in a pensive and even melancholy mood; and slowly through the streets he bent his way back towards the British Embassy, where the grand entertainment was being given. He was muffled up in a cloak;—not that he had now any longer the slightest cause for self-concealment or disguise in the city of Florence; but the evening was excessively cold. He had not proceeded very far, when he encountered another person who was cloaked like himself; but the recognition was immediate and mutual.

"What! my dear friend," ejaculated Marcellin, "you have left the festive scene?"

"But it would appear," answered our hero, with a smile—for Charles De Vere it was whom the

young Frenchman thus met,—“it would appear that you had deserted the entertainment long before I thought of doing so!”

“I have been to fulfil a promise,” returned Marcellin,—“a promise which I made in the morning—to the effect that I would call upon Floribel——”

“Floribel?” ejaculated Charles, with a sudden start. “What! has she revealed herself? or how did you discover who she is? But Ah! doubtless you learnt the fact from the lips of Hector Hardress, or his sister——”

“No, my dear friend,” interrupted Edgar; “I learnt the fact from Floribel’s own lips. Her conversation has been serious even to solemnity: I offered everything which the deepest, deepest sense of gratitude could suggest—yes, it was even marriage that I proposed—but she refused—we have separated—we shall meet no more!”

“I was on my way to see her,” said Charles; “and I also expect to have a serious and solemn discourse with her; for I feel it to be my duty to make one more attempt to save the erring creature—to bring her back into the path of virtue——”

“She will not suffer you to act as a medium of communication between herself and Miss Evelyn,” interjected Edgar. “But go and see her; for there are many reasons why she may listen to you in reference to matters whereon she would not permit me to touch.”

The two young men separated; and Marcellin, not feeling any inclination to return into the midst of the gaieties of the British Embassy, entered a café to while away an hour with the newspapers. He had not been there many moments when an Italian gentleman entered, bringing a piece of intelligence which he at once communicated to several acquaintances whom he met there. A decree had just been issued by the Grand Duke, removing the Count of Ramorino from the office of Minister of Police; and it further appeared that the disgraced functionary had already fled from Florence, or at all events that he had disappeared abruptly to avoid the consequences of his various misdeeds; for the officers of justice had been vainly hunting for him in every direction.

Meanwhile Charles De Vere proceeded to the hotel where Floribel Lister had taken up her quarters: but he inquired for her as the Signora Ciprina, by which name she was known at the establishment.

“The signora,” replied the landlord, “has just taken her departure.”

“Taken her departure?” ejaculated De Vere, in astonishment. “How long ago?”

“Not ten minutes have elapsed, signor, since the young lady departed. A postchaise was ordered all in a moment——”

“And whither has she gone?” demanded our hero impatiently.

“She said she was going to Rome, signor,” rejoined the landlord. “Nothing could be more hurried than the whole proceeding. I hope there is nothing wrong?”

“Nothing,” answered our hero; and he hastened from the hotel.

As he was retracing his way towards the British Embassy, absorbed in painful reflections with

regard to Floribel Lister, he again encountered Edgar Marcellin, who was just issuing from the coffee-house.

“Have you heard the intelligence?” exclaimed the young Frenchman. “Ramorino is displaced—and he has fled!”

“And Floribel has departed,” cried De Vere. “She must have left as speedily as possible after bidding you farewell.”

“I am not surprised at it,” said Marcellin.

“But Ah! if you wish to see her, it may not be too late. Come with me!”

A hackney vehicle was passing at the time: Marcellin stopped it—he and Charles at once took their seats therein—and the driver was ordered to proceed to the French Embassy.

“You cannot expect to find Floribel there?” said De Vere, in astonishment.

“But her maid Antonia is there,” answered Edgar; “and rest assured that she will not leave Florence without her.”

“Ah!” ejaculated Charles; “then there is a chance for me to see Floribel again! But why did not Antonia join her mistress sooner?”

“The French Ambassador considered that as Antonia was a witness in the case which has this day been investigated, it was better she should remain apart from her mistress, so that the Judge might not be led to suppose there was any collusion, or straining of any particular points, in order to clear my character or to throw any additional obliquity on the deceased Marchioness. When the investigation was over, Antonia and Bernardo were ordered to repair at once to the Mirano mansion, to receive from the steward the wages that were due to them, and also to procure their personal effects.—But here we are at the Embassy!”

Marcellin and De Vere leapt out. The former hastened to put a few questions to the porter at the entrance; and then, again turning towards his friend, he said, “We are too late! she is gone!”

“Gone? Who? Antonia?” ejaculated Charles.

“Yes,” replied Marcellin. “It appears that Antonia only returned with her boxes from the Mirano mansion ten minutes ago; and at the very same instant a postchaise drove up——”

“Ah! I understand!” said De Vere. “Floribel came to fetch Antonia!”

“This is what I thought she would do,” rejoined Edgar: “but we are too late! Yet there is still a chance! Come quick, De Vere!”

The young men again sprang into the hackney-vehicle; and now Edgar ordered it to proceed to the Mirano mansion.

“Floribel,” he said, “will perhaps call there to procure her own effects; for the steward has received orders to give them up to her.”

“Ah! then there is still a chance!” exclaimed De Vere; “for I would not that we should part thus without one last effort on my part to establish her welfare on some solid foundation.”

The two young men reached the Mirano mansion; but as they sprang forth from the vehicle, they beheld no postchaise waiting in front of the entrance. Their eyes swept along the street—but no retreating vehicle met their view; nor did the sounds of any equipage fall upon their ears.

“It is impossible,” exclaimed Marcellin, “that

Floribel could have had time to call, gather her effects together, and take her departure again. But let us see!"

Thus speaking, he rang the bell; and the gate-porter made his appearance. Immediately recognising Marcellin, the man bowed respectfully, and said in a mournful voice, "Ah, signor! this is a sad business!—a very sad business!"

"It is indeed," replied the young Frenchman. "But tell me, has the Signora Ciprina been hither?"

"Yes, signor; she called in a postchaise about ten minutes ago."

"Always ten minutes too late!" ejaculated De Vere. "But let us speed in pursuit—for I must see her!"

"Stop, my dear friend!" cried Marcellin, catching him by the arm; "it is useless! A wretched hack-vehicle would never overtake a post-chaise! Besides, how do you know which route she may be pursuing? She may say Rome when she means Ravenna!"

"True!" said De Vere. "I am afraid that I must abandon all thoughts of an interview with poor erring Floribel!"

"But how long could the Signora Ciprina have stopped here?" inquired Marcellin, again turning towards the gate-porter.

"Not more than a few instants, signor," was the response.

"A few instants to pack up all her effects!" cried Marcellin, incredulously.

"Antonia had already done it, signor. She came to look after her own property; and the steward told her to put the Signora Ciprina's effects together also. So Antonia packed them up; and thus the boxes were all ready for removal the instant the chaise stopped at the door."

At this moment the steward made his appearance in the lobby of the gateway; and bowing to Marcellin and De Vere (for he knew the latter on account of having seen him that day at the Judge's residence), he said with a gloomy shake of his head, "Ah, signors! this is a house of mourning now; for no matter how guilty the Marchioness may have been, she was a kind mistress to her dependants—and we all feel deeply the tragic occurrence! Besides, the establishment will be broken up—the mansion and its costly furniture will be sold—and numbers of domestics who have long lived together like one family as it were, will be separated and thrown out of employment."

"Where is the corpse of the Marchioness?" inquired Edgar.

"It is lying in the large dining-room," was the reply. "It is already in its coffin; and the funeral is to take place to-morrow—but quite privately as you may suppose, signors. Will you walk in?"

Marcellin shook his head, saying, "My recollections of the interior of this mansion are in many respects too painful——"

"Nevertheless," interrupted the steward, "you would render me a great service, signor, if you would enter the establishment. There is a secret——"

"I comprehend" exclaimed Marcellin. "You wish to know the secret of the passage unto which allusion was frequently made before the Judge this day?"

The steward answered in the affirmative,—adding, "I can find no key that fits the door opening into the stable-yard; and I do not dare to employ any violent means to force an entrance, because the mansion is now the property of the State. But I have a great curiosity to visit this secret passage of which so much has been said."

"The key of the door opening into the stable-yard," said Marcellin, "I myself took away with me when I escaped with Antonia by means of the secret avenue; and I have left it in my room at the French Embassy. But inasmuch as it is a harmless curiosity on your part, and likewise a very natural one," he continued, thus addressing himself to the steward, "I will show you the secret means of entrance from the suite of apartments which the Signora Ciprina used to occupy. And perhaps you, De Vere," added Marcellin, "would have no objection to inspect that strange mysterious place along which you were hurried with a shawl or kerchief thrown over your head?"

"Come," said our hero; "let us visit it."

The steward led the way up the grand staircase; and in a minute or two the ante-room of the suite of apartments which Ciprina used to occupy, was reached. Edgar Marcellin could not help shuddering when he thought of all the tremendous perils he had incurred beneath that roof; and then his heart was melted with emotions as he thought the next instant of all the tender seductivities and attentions which Floribel had lavished upon him in this suite of rooms.

"I must tell you candidly, signors," said the steward, "that I have been examining the wainscot and walls of every one of these rooms with the utmost care—but without success."

"Did you not think of asking Antonia to tell you the secret?" inquired Marcellin.

"Strange to say, it never struck me," responded the steward. "When we were before the Judge to-day, you, signor, did not specify from which room the secret communication opened: you merely spoke in general terms of the suite of apartments possessing this secret issue——"

"I will soon satisfy your curiosity," said Marcellin. "The secret communication is here, in this ante-room! Look! I count the gilt nails—I press upon this particular one—and behold the result!"

The door had flown open, just as if it were a portion of the wainscot giving way in a place where there was previously no visible evidence of the existence of a door at all. The steward held a wax taper in his hand; but Marcellin said, "If we are going to traverse the passage, we will light another in case of one being extinguished by the draught. Come! I will lead the way, as I am acquainted with the geography of the place."

Provided with a light, Marcellin crossed the threshold and entered the passage: De Vere followed; the steward, carrying the second taper, brought up the rear. They threaded the stone passage—the steward ejaculating at almost every pace, "Who would ever have suspected it? And I, who fancied myself a confidential servant, never to have been trusted with the secret!"

"Ah!" thought Charles, within himself, "the position of affairs is somewhat different now, from



what it was when, enveloped in darkness, I was hurried along this passage in the custody of the *sbirri*!"

And Edgar Marcellin mentally exclaimed, "How short a time has elapsed since Lucrezia was in my power, threading this passage!—what a cloud of incidents has burst over me since then!—and *she*, that wretched woman, is no more!"

The end of the passage was reached; and Marcellin was just on the point of beginning the descent of the spiral staircase, when he stopped suddenly short, for it struck him that he heard a hasty footstep below. Could it have been the echo of his own? Yes—he felt convinced that it must be; and he pursued his way. De Vere and the Steward fancied that he had merely stopped short for a moment on account of coming somewhat abruptly on the top of the stone steps.

Down those steps they proceeded; and in a few

moments they reached the cellar-like place which existed at the bottom. Marcellin held the wax candle high up, so as to throw its light completely round;—and at the same instant an ejaculation burst from the lips of Charles De Vere, while he sprang forward towards the darkest nook of the place. There—crouching down, and half buried in a species of niche—was the form of a man, upon whom De Vere seized and dragged him forth into the light. Then, as the individual raised himself to an upright posture, and by his manner showed that he did not purpose any resistance against odds that it would be impossible to compete with—the light of the tapers streaming on his countenance, revealed the bearded face of the Count of Ramorino!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE APPOINTMENT AT NOON.

WE must now carry back the reader's attention to the metropolis of Great Britain. We must return to London, where the scene of so large a portion of our narrative has been previously laid. We are about to bid farewell to the present to that beautiful Italian clime where so many dark deeds have been perpetrated: we are about to leave for a space all those characters who have been moving with such strange rapidity upon the stage of our drama throughout so many consecutive chapters. And this does indeed appear to be the most fitting point whereat to take leave of them—the most suitable crisis of our story for breaking the thread of events, to resume it in another part of the world. For the episode which relates the misfortunes and the crimes of the beautiful Lucrezia di Mirano, is now terminated: her destiny has been fulfilled—and she has left behind her a name as infamous as that of her prototype Lucrezia Borgia. And Ciprina has gone nobody knows whither—and Count Ramorino is in the hands of justice—and Father Falconara is on his way back to the Castle of Bagno, to relieve the mind of Captain Belluno and relate to him all the startling incidents which have just occurred in Florence. And Edgar Marcellin is now free to think tenderly of Corinna: and Signor Paoli is ready to accompany him back to England; and Charles De Verr, having nothing further to detain him in Florence, is only waiting to see whether the quadroom and her husband are likely to make their appearance in that capital ere he shall retrace his way to Naples.

This, then, as we have said, is a most favourable conjuncture to enable us to redirect the attention of our readers to the British metropolis; and of that opportunity we at once purpose to avail ourselves.

The progress of our narrative has brought us down to the date of the 4th of November; and it is on this very same day that we purpose to look into the office of Mr. Timperley, in Lincoln's Inn Fields. It was verging towards the hour of noon; and the lawyer was alone in his own sanctum. He appeared to have given more than usual care to his toilet; and his writing table, instead of being confusedly strewn with letters and documents, presented an aspect of exceeding neatness. Three or four bundles of papers, tied round with red tape—all endorsed with the same name, and placed together in a row—were now occupying the attention of the old lawyer. We thereby mean that as he sat in his arm chair, his gaze was fixed seriously upon those bundles of papers; and presently he murmured to himself, "Well, after all, the presentiment that made me preserve them is about to receive its fulfilment! They are to be claimed! they will be taken possession of!"

Then Mr. Timperley experienced a certain degree of uneasiness, and he was seized with a certain restlessness against which he vainly strove to wrestle.

"What does this mean?" he asked himself, as he rose up from his seat and walked to and fro in the office. "Is this date to be a very

memorable one for me? is it to mark an era of good or evil? Let me see. Can that man do me any harm? is it his interest to do it?"

Mr. Timperley resumed his seat at his desk—buried his face in his hands, while his elbows rested upon the table—and gave way to his reflections. From these he was startled by the sudden striking of a timepiece on the mantel; and he ejaculated to himself, "'Tis noon!—the hour at which he was to be here?"

Just as the last stroke of the clock was vibrating through the office, the door was thrown open, and a clerk announced Mr. Hargrave.

"Walk in, Mr. Hargrave," said Mr. Timperley, while the door remained open; but the instant the clerk had retired and closed it behind him, the lawyer's demeanour became profoundly respectful—and with a low bow he said, "Be pleased, my lord, to be seated."

The manner of Lord Ormsby—as we may now call him—was cold, reserved, and distant, as he took the chair that was placed for his accommodation. He was dressed in black, as when we last introduced him to our readers; and it was in a deep-toned voice that he said, "Mr. Timperley, have you obeyed my instructions?"

"I have, my lord," replied the attorney. "Here are all the papers relating to your lordship's case, with the exception of the one little but important document——"

"Which I have here," interjected Lord Ormsby, taking out his pocket-book and producing a small slip. "Mr. Timperley," he continued, "you will put this baptismal certificate in the place where it properly belongs amongst those files of papers. Let the whole chain of legal proofs be made complete: let every link take its proper fitting."

The lawyer took up one of the bundles of papers which lay before him; and he inserted the certificate in the place to which it properly belonged.

"Now, my lord," he said; "the whole legal narrative, as I may denominate it, is complete: the one link that was wanting is restored!—the certificate which connects your grandaunt Andrew Evelyn with the Evelyns of the Ormsby race! At any moment your lordship's claims can be made good."

"Mr. Timperley," said Lord Ormsby, "I am thus far satisfied with you. It was on the 16th of October that I presented myself before you and your wife in Regent Street; and on that same day you promised to have every deed and document in readiness for me by the hour of noon this day, November the 4th—and you have fulfilled your pledge."

Mr. Timperley bowed; and for a moment he suffered himself to be betrayed into an expression of satisfaction—for he rubbed his hands as he thought to himself, "The business is not going to be taken from me!"

"You see that I have become precise as a man of business," continued Lord Ormsby. "I specify dates—yes, even to the very hour! The experience of the past," he added, bitterly, and riveting his luminous black eyes significantly upon the lawyer, "has taught me lessons which cannot be easily forgotten."

"No doubt, my lord! no doubt!" said Mr. Timperley. "Your lordship must have gained a great deal of experience. Let me see? It is

nearly nineteen years since—but I need not allude to unpleasant occurrences—”

“There is no reason why they should not be alluded to, Mr. Timperley,” said Lord Ormsby, in that deep-toned voice of his which seemed to penetrate into the very profundities of the lawyer’s soul with an effect as if it were a knell awakening a remorse with all its concomitant terrors. “Why not proceed openly and frankly and boldly to state that nearly nineteen years have elapsed since the devilish piece of villany contrived by my father-in-law Joshua Waldron, aided by a certain Thomas Timperley, proved the fertile source of a thousand calamities?”

“My lord! my lord!” said Timperley, with a half-frightened, half-deprecating manner, “I hope your lordship will not use terms that are too harsh. Be pleased to remember that I was a mere clerk at the time—a servant to a master whose bread I ate—who paid me wages—”

“Do you mean to tell me,” interrupted Lord Ormsby, with a movement of disgust and aversion, “that because he paid you a wage, he bought you, body and soul? But let that pass! I tell you at once, Mr. Timperley, that I am going to take no step which may unnecessarily compromise you. Not that for an instant I would have you suppose it is through friendship towards yourself I am chary of your reputation. Nothing of the sort! But there is the reputation of others that I would fair screen to the utmost of my power. I will not suffer the grave to be ransacked, that the memory of my father-in-law may be disinterred, so to speak—or that the name of my wretched and long-perished wife Honoria may likewise be covered with obloquy. For have I not a daughter living—”

“Yes, yes, my lord!” ejaculated Timperley—
“a daughter as amiable as she is beautiful!”

“Rest assured,” interrupted Ormsby, with that cynical bitterness which was habitual to him, “I should not take the guarantee of her character from *your* lips!—no, not even the character of my own daughter! I believe in nothing from hearsay; neither do I believe in anything from outward appearances only. In a word, I believe nothing but that which I ascertain for myself—which I see with my own eyes—or know of my own knowledge—or ascertain through agents of my own appointing, and in whose trustworthiness I can place reliance. Ah! you may stare at me, Mr. Timperley!—but did not you yourself just now admit that experience must have taught me many rude lessons?”

“Yes, yes, my lord! no doubt of it!” said the attorney.

“You do well to assure yourself,” continued Ormsby, “that the person whom you now see before you is a very different being indeed from him whom you beheld fleeing away from England nineteen years ago! The Morton Evelyn of to-day is different indeed from the Morton Evelyn of that period! The real Lord Ormsby of this date is very different from the false Lord Ormsby of the period to which we are referring! What did you think, Mr. Timperley when after having presented myself to you in Regent Street, the other day, the very next thing I said to you was this—*‘You have got all the documents which regard my case, and it were useless for you to deny it!’*”

“When you said that to me, my lord,” replied Timperley, “I wondered how you could possibly know it. But I suppose you naturally concluded the documents were of far too great consequence to make away with?”

Ormsby’s lips wreathed scornfully; and he said, “No—nothing of the sort! How was I to judge what estimate you might place upon the documents? How did I know but that Waldron himself might have destroyed them ere he committed suicide? or how was I to know that you yourself had not destroyed them, so that there might be naught to criminate *you*?”

“True, my lord!” said Timperley; and for a few moments he looked bewildered. “Then how was it that your lordship knew these papers were still in my possession?”

“You are already aware,” continued Ormsby, “how the baptismal certificate of my grandniece Andrew Evelyn came into my possession.”

“Your lordship told me the other day,” replied Timperley. “The certificate had accidentally got inside a deed which I had given to my niece Cicely, that she might take it to your daughter Agnes—whence it might finally reach the hands of old Mr. Barrington—”

“Yes: and did I not tell you,” resumed Ormsby, “how that deed travelled out to the West Indies, and how by the dispensations of providence it was made to fall into my hands, so that when I opened it I beheld inside the certificate,—the lawful certificate which was to put me in possession of my birthright! Then I said to myself, *‘If Mr. Timperley is still harping on the affair of the Ormsby estates and thinking it worth while to collect the documents which regard that matter, he must have preserved the old ones!’*”

“Ah! the calculation was made with infinite tact,” cried the attorney. “I really do not think that the same idea would have struck me! But your lordship was just now speaking of your daughter. May I inquire if you have yet seen Miss Evelyn?”

“I have seen her: yes, I have seen her nearly every day since I arrived in London, which is upwards of six weeks ago; for I had been in the metropolis nearly a month before I determined upon presenting myself to you. Yes—I have seen my daughter—but it has only been from a distance; and I have not yet spoken to her—nor does she know that I am in existence!”

“And I can assure you, my lord, that both myself and Mrs. Timperley have kept the secret most religiously, according to your injunctions. But pray suffer me to ask wherefore your lordship is thus delaying that which ought to prove a joy and a delight—”

“Think you that it would have been a joy and a delight,” interrupted Ormsby, sternly, “to go and claim, recognise, and acknowledge a daughter without being previously confident that she was worthy of such acknowledgment? Did I not learn how her cousin Floribel Lister fled from her home—”

“Ah, well, my lord,” said Mr. Timperley; “I see that your wisdom and prudence and caution are very great! But might I be permitted to inquire wherefore, after arriving in England, you suffered an entire month to elapse ere you deigned to

honour me with an intimation of your existence?"

"Think you, Mr. Timperley," asked the nobleman, with a strong cynical bitterness again in his accents,—"think you that I was going to place myself at all in your power, or throw myself upon your tender mercies? It is true I had obtained possession of the genuine document that was wanted as a legal and legitimate substitute for the document which you and Waldron forged nineteen years ago. But then, how could I tell with any degree of accuracy how matters were left by my sudden flight from England at the period to which we have been glancing back? Prosecutions might have been instituted—warrants might have been issued and never recalled; in short, Mr. Timperley, it was only consistent with ordinary prudence that I should obtain the certitude of my own safety before taking a step that might have the slightest chance of placing me in your power."

"I am sorry, my lord," said Timperley, with an obsequious bow, "that I should enjoy so little of your lordship's confidence. Pardon me for adding, my lord, that if nineteen years have made a difference in your lordship, they have done the same with me. I am no longer the humble clerk, compelled to obey the mandates of a master, even though it be to become the accomplice in a crime! I am rich, and consequently independent. I am well connected too. My niece, as you may be aware, has married the Hon. Hector Hardrees; and she will be one day Lady Mendlesham. Thus you see, my lord, my position offers guarantees——"

"Well, Mr. Timperley," interrupted Ormsby, "perhaps I myself have come to the same conclusion; perhaps after having instituted some inquiries, I considered that you might be trusted up to a certain point. Or else think you that I should have granted you a delay of three weeks to enable you to get all those documents together, when if it had suited your purpose to destroy them it would have only taken three minutes to do so? But still you perhaps will not be astonished to learn that I am going to take the business out of your hands."

"Indeed, my lord!" said Timperley, with a visible start. "This is an announcement which I was indeed very far from expecting!"

"In less than an hour, Mr. Timperley," interrupted Ormsby, "all those documents will be in the hands of the Solicitor of the Treasury."

"Good heavens, my lord!" ejaculated Timperley, "this is the very point on which I have been so uneasy! You must know that shortly after your unfortunate father-in-law Mr. Waldron put a period to his existence, some Government official called to demand that all deeds and documents in any way connected with your claim should be given up."

"And you told him," said Lord Ormsby, "that——"

"That no such papers were in my possession," rejoined Timperley, "and that none had been found in the office; so that I supposed Mr. Waldron must have destroyed them before he destroyed himself."

"Yes—I know you said this," observed Lord Ormsby curtly.

"You knew it, my lord?" cried the lawyer, with another start.

"Yes. Did I not just now tell you that I have instituted all kinds of inquiries by a variety of secret means?"

"Ah, true, my lord!" said Timperley. "And what account will your lordship give to the Solicitor of the Treasury?"

"None," was Ormsby's curt response. "I shall merely demand that my claims be acknowledged by virtue of the unquestionable legal and genealogical evidence afforded by those papers."

"Ah!" cried Timperley, his countenance brightening up: "if your lordship purposes to act in this manner, it is indeed a reason why the business should be taken out of my hands."

"And in what other manner do you suppose I could act, to be consistent with my desire to avoid raising questions which may affect the reputation of those who are sleeping placidly in their graves?"

"You will be asked, my lord," said Timperley, "why you fled so abruptly from England nineteen years ago."

"And if I chose to obey the impulse of a whim or caprice," said Ormsby, "what is that to any one?"

"But it may be hinted, my lord," resumed Timperley, "that you fled because of certain irregularities in the deeds."

"But they will find all those deeds perfectly regular," interrupted Ormsby, pointing to the documents upon the writing-table; "and what then can they say?"

"They will perhaps surmise," suggested Timperley, "that they are not altogether the same documents."

"Well, but if I tell them that they are the same documents," exclaimed Ormsby; "and if I choose to suffer them to understand that I took them away with me nineteen years ago—that they have ever since been in my possession——"

"Ah, well, my lord," cried Timperley, "in this case it cannot be thought that Mr. Waldron destroyed them because some of them were forged."

"And thus," interjected Ormsby, "I save the reputation of Mr. Waldron—or rather, I rescue and redeem it from whatsoever obloquy, more or less, that may have ever fallen upon it. In the same way do I throw a protecting shield over the memory of my unfortunate wife. Ay, and by the force of circumstances, Mr. Timperley," added Lord Ormsby, "you yourself also will become shielded and protected—though heaven knows that I would not travel very far out of my way to do this on your account alone!"

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Timperley, with a low bow, "I am deeply indebted to your lordship. The course your lordship purposes to adopt, will save a thousand inconveniences. It is very prudent and very wise, my lord!"—and Mr. Timperley again rubbed his hands in an ungovernable paroxysm of joy.

"Yes," responded Lord Ormsby, with a cutting irony, "it will save you the inconvenience of ever being told by the Government authorities that you were guilty of a dishonourable falsehood when you denied having certain papers in your possession!—it will likewise save you from the inconvenience of being ever taxed with complicity in a

fool forgery! But, Ah! Mr. Timperley, you might suffer all the consequences of your past misdeeds, and the memories of my father-in-law and my wife might remain subject to any obloquy or suspicion which may at any time have been thrown upon them, were it not that I possess a daughter who I now know to be the most virtuous, the most amiable, and the most generous of her sex! Yes—I have sufficiently watched her proceedings, and by other means have I sufficiently espied her actions! Ah, you start at that word *espied*? You doubtless think it strange that a father should place spies to watch his daughter! But I tell you again that I will believe in no human virtue until I shall have tried it: I will have faith in nothing which is not incontrovertibly proved unto me! Well, then, I repeat, I am now satisfied with my Agnes; and ere many hours shall have elapsed will she be folded in my arms. I think, Mr. Timperley," added Lord Ormsby, rising from his seat, "that we can have now nothing more to say. We have sufficiently discussed the past;—and as for the present, I have only to take possession of these deeds which you have looked out and sorted for me."

"But as to the future, my lord," interjected the attorney, with an obsequious bow, "if you should need my professional services—"

"Rest assured, Mr. Timperley," said Ormsby, breaking in upon the lawyer's speech with all the cynical bitterness of a retort, "rest assured that if I require your services, I shall not hesitate to avail myself of them. And who can tell? I have seen the Red Indian in the Far West have recourse to the serpent to borrow that serpent's venom wherein to dip the points of his arrows ere going forth to fight an enemy. Why, then, should not I—"

"My lord, I pray you to remember," said Mr. Timperley, with a malignant gleaming of his small reptile-like eyes, "that your illustration is one somewhat calculated to give offence. Unless indeed—Ha! Ha!"—and Mr. Timperley suddenly deemed it expedient to change his look and tone; "your lordship is pleased to be facetious!"

"Ah! facetious?" was the curt ejaculation that broke from Ormsby's lips. "Yes—doubtless one has a humour for facetiousness after being knocked about the world for some nineteen years as I have been! And think you not, Mr. Timperley, that it is enough to make a man merry and put him into good humour with the entire human race, to have seen what I have seen and to have known what I have known? Perhaps you will next ask me to come and dance at some ball or take my part in a merry-making? Look at this hair! You know what my age is—and you can tell therefore whether a person in his forty-fourth year ought in the natural course of things to be as grey as I am? Oh!" he exclaimed, with the supremest scorn alike in his tone and in the expression of his countenance, "it was a lucky hit on your part, Mr. Timperley, when you attributed facetiousness unto me!"

There was so much withering irony in the language thus addressed by Lord Ormsby to the attorney, that the latter was almost overwhelmed by the power of his words.

"I beg your lordship's pardon," he said, shrinking, quailing, and trembling: "I am sure I did not mean to offend—"

"Enough, Mr. Timperley! enough!" interrupted the nobleman.

Lord Ormsby now proceeded to secure about his person the various packages of papers which Mr. Timperley had prepared for him; and when he had done this, he turned towards the lawyer, on whom he fixed his brilliant black eyes with a look that might pierce into the very depths of the soul; and he said, "You are sure that every requisite paper is there?—that nothing is wanting?"

"I am sure of it, my lord," answered Timperley. "Your lordship must comprehend that if it suited me to give you any of the papers, it was to my interest to put them *all* into your possession."

"It was thus that I calculated," remarked Ormsby; then pulling from his pocket-book a number of bank-notes, he went on to observe, "Here are five hundred pounds. On the day when you see the newspapers announcing that my claims have been recognised by the Government, and that nothing remains to be fulfilled but the formality of obtaining the recognition of my title by a Committee of Privileges of the House of Lords, you may send one of your clerks to me, and I will remit you a similar amount."

Mr. Timperley bowed very low on beholding the bank-notes; but it was almost to the very floor that he bent when he received this additional proof of what he conceived to be Ormsby's munificence. The nobleman comprehended what was passing in his mind; and with one of those withering sneers which so often swept over his countenance, he said, "Do not think, Mr. Timperley, that you owe anything to mere abstract generosity on my part. It is not so! I love you not sufficiently to give you a crust to save you from starvation if I beheld you plunged down in the deepest vortex of misery. But if I cannot be generous towards you as a fellow-creature, I can at least be just while dealing with you as a professional man. You kept those papers as a matter of calculation, with the hope that some day or another they would produce a recompense. Well then, you have earned me by so keeping them; because, although it is perfectly true that with the knowledge that I now possess of the whole chain of lineage, step by step and link by link, I might instruct any other clever practitioner to get together the requisite documents, it would nevertheless be a work of time, trouble, and expense. All this you have saved me; and you are therefore deserving of your reward just in the same way that a labourer is worthy of his hire. Do not therefore for a single moment flatter yourself that it is through any friendly feeling towards you personally that I am thus acting: it is from a sense of duty and of justice only."

"I do not the less thank your lordship," said Mr. Timperley, with an obsequious bow. "But I am grieved to find that there is still so much bitterness lurking in your soul towards me."

"Bitterness towards you?" exclaimed Ormsby. "Bitterness?" he repeated: and then he stepped back a pace or two, and slowly surveyed the lawyer from head to foot and from foot to head, as if to assure himself that the individual thus standing before him could possibly entertain any reasonable doubt as to the existence of such cause of bitterness. "Think you, Mr. Timperley, that I have

forgotten how on a particular day, nineteen years ago, I listened at the door of Waldron's private room—*this room!—that door!*—and heard you and him disputing together, so that all the tremendous villainies which had been concocted between you suddenly burst upon my knowledge with an effect that was all but annihilating."

"And yet," ejaculated Mr. Timperley, "you were the real heir of the Ormsby property after all!—you were the rightful Evelyn!"

"Yes: but you did not know it *then*—neither did you think so," rejoined the nobleman sternly. "And, Ah! Mr. Timperley, think you that I have forgotten another scene which took place a few hours later on that very same day? Let me remind you of it! It was a handsome drawing-room at the West End. There stood Mr. Waldron, shrinking and trembling before me; and there was a gloriously handsome woman—it was my own wife Honoria—turning disdainfully away from me because I would not yield to her cajoleries and become a villain! And then the door opened—and the accomplice of all that villainy appeared; and this accomplice was *you*, Mr. Timperley!—*you*, the now respectable solicitor who rolls in his carriage, who gives splendid entertainments, who has become well connected, and whose niece will in due time shine as a peeress in England's aristocratic galaxy!"

"But why, my lord—why," asked Timperley, "revert to scenes so disagreeable and to periods which it were better to banish from the memory?"

"Your question does indeed make me ask myself," said Ormsby, in his deep-toned voice, "why I am remaining here to waste words upon you, and wherefore I am extending to an hour that appointment which needed not to have occupied more than a dozen minutes? But perhaps it is that the long pent-up feelings of my soul required this vent!—perhaps it is that I am now taking my revenge upon you, such as it may be, by forcing you to retrospect upon scenes stamped with the black iniquity a portion of which has cast its shadow upon your own soul! And you recollect that scene which I was last describing?—you remember how I burst from the room? And then you know," added Ormsby, with the deepest solemnity, and with a voice so sepulchral that it did really seem as if it came from the dead, "I was heard of no more!"

"Ah, my lord! if you had come back," ejaculated Timperley,—*"or if you had only written a single line to alleviate the horrible suspense—"*

"Suspense? Ah!" interposed Ormsby; "the suspense of those who endured the poignant grief which their tremendous selfishness deserved when they beheld all their golden visions fading from their view! Ah, Mr. Timperley! there have been times when I have known, when I have felt, and when I have also said that it was no light thing for a man to flee away from his home, from his wife, and from his child! But when I found that the wife whom I loved and of whom I was proud, had become imbued with the wickedness of her father—"

"My lord, you are wrong! you are wrong!" exclaimed Timperley. "I swear it!" he added, emphatically.

"Do not attempt to deceive me," said Ormsby

quivering all over. "I heard that she died within a year after the date of my flight and her father's self-destruction. Yes—this intelligence reached me by some accident in the far-off American clime to which I had fled;—and though I naturally guessed it was of a broken heart, yet methought—methought"—and here Ormsby's voice grew more and more tremulous—"methought, I say, that it was through blighted ambition—defeated hopes of aggrandizement—baffled pride—"

"No, my lord! no!" interjected Timperley. "It was through despair on your account that the loving heart was broken!"

The lawyer looked with frankness, candour, and sincerity in Ormsby's face as he thus spoke. There was now something very different in the expression of Mr. Timperley's countenance from what it usually was; so that Ormsby could not possibly entertain the slightest doubt as to the man's truthfulness in the present instance. The nobleman shook with the violence of those emotions which he endeavoured alike to curb and to conceal: but stronger and stronger grew those feelings—and at length, sinking upon a seat, he said in a half-dying tone, "Tell me—tell me how Honoria's last days were spent?"

The lawyer also resumed his seat; and he proceeded to describe to Lord Ormsby how Honoria had rushed after him on the day when he had fled so precipitately, crying "Morton, Morton! dear Morton! come back!" And he went on to tell the nobleman how dreadfully Honoria felt his flight and mysterious silence; and he said, "I saw her weep over the infant Agnes, my lord, as she had never wept before!—and she used to strain it to her bosom, murmuring your name!"

Lord Ormsby groaned: he rose from his seat—he pressed his hand to his brow—his lips quivered violently for a few moments. But to some extent mastering his emotions, he sat down again, saying, "Go on. What else have you to tell me?"

"I have but little more to say, my lord," continued Timperley—"unless it be that during the year which your wife survived your sudden flight, she never held up her head; and I frequently heard Mr. Lister say that it was not disappointed ambition which was killing her, but it was because now that it was too late, her eyes were opened to a comprehension of all your good and noble qualities, my lord!"

"Is this true, Mr. Timperley? is this true?" asked Ormsby in a tremulous voice.

"As I have a soul to be saved!" exclaimed the lawyer emphatically.

"My God!"—and now Lord Ormsby's emotions burst forth beyond the power of control; the strong man wept and sobbed like a child: the rock was smitten—the waters were gushing forth: the stone was rolled away from the sepulchre of his heart, and light dawned in upon it!

For several minutes did that abolition of feeling last; and during this interval Ormsby's countenance was concealed from Timperley's view, either being averted when he wept so bitterly, or being buried in his hands when he sobbed so convulsively. And now, as he wiped away his tears and slowly turned his looks upon the lawyer, the latter was struck by the idea that some great and signal change had taken place in Ormsby's aspect.

Was it that the rod which had just now stricken the sterile rock of his breast had become also an enchanter's wand to work its spell upon his features?—was it that the tears which had welled forth from his eyes, had with their torrents swept away the dark sombre looks of cynicism?—was it that the cloud having discharged its deluge, had passed away from the heaven which it had darkened, leaving it in a serene and placid sunlight? We do not say that it was precisely in such terms as these that Mr. Timperley questioned himself on the point: but, as we have intimated, he was assuredly struck by the change that had taken place within the last few minutes in Lord Ormsby's looks.

"You have told me something, Mr. Timperley, which has affected me deeply," he said, in a voice that was milder and less lugubrious than it had hitherto sounded. "I could not have possibly foreseen that such a revelation was in store for me! Alas, after all I had judged Honoria too harshly! God have mercy upon her soul for having given me the cause thus sternly to judge!—and God forgive me for having done it!"

With these words Lord Ormsby turned abruptly away from the lawyer's presence, and quitted the house.

CHAPTER XX.

CORINNA AND AGNES.

THE reader will remember that when we last spoke of Corinna Paoli, we left her stretched upon a bed of sickness, on which she had been thrown by the sudden announcement that her lover Edgar Marcellin was the murderer of her brother Giulio. But as the reader has no doubt surmised, Edgar Marcellin succeeded in satisfying Corinna that he was completely innocent of the heinous crime, which could be ascribed only to the Marchioness di Mirano. Thus, when Edgar had set off from Eogland on his expedition to Florence, he left Corinna with a tremendous weight taken off her mind, and experiencing a sudden improvement in her health, which was naturally the result of that mental alleviation.

It was about eighteen days since Marcellin had taken his departure, and Corinna was as yet entirely without any intelligence with regard to the numerous adventures he had experienced in the Tuscan capital. She had received one letter from him: it was hurriedly written from Genoa, to say that he had arrived thus far in safety and was about to make the best of his way on to Florence. The young girl was now completely restored to health, and enabled to go forth and take exercise as usual.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon of the same day on which the interview had taken place between Mr. Timperley and Lord Ormsby, that Corinna was walking in the garden belonging to Sidney Villa. Her little brother was home from school for a half-holiday, and was playing about with his little sister—for the day was a fine one. Every now and then Corinna looked towards the iron gates; and she mentally ejaculated, "I certainly thought he would have come this afternoon!

Could I have mistaken what he told me the day before yesterday?"

Presently, when her little brother and sister were at a considerable distance in the garden, Corinna opened the gate and went out into the road. An ejaculation escaped her lips; for behold! at a little distance she perceived the gentleman whom she was expecting. She hastened towards him, exclaiming, "I thought I could not have misunderstood you, Mr. Hargrave! I was almost sure you would come!"

"Yes—I promised to be with you this afternoon," he replied: "but I am half-an-hour later than I had expected I should be. I have been detained on business of the most important nature."

"And to-day, you know, Mr. Hargrave," said Corinna, "you are to give me important information. Do you not remember that these were the words you used the day before yesterday?"

"And I intend to keep my promise," was the response. "But can you walk with me for half-an-hour?"

"Yes," answered Corinna: "my little brother and sister are playing in the garden, where they cannot possibly take any harm."

"Then let us walk up this diverging avenue, as usual—and you must listen attentively to me, Corinna; for the revelations I am about to make are indeed of a most important nature."

"Oh! rest assured, Mr. Hargrave, that I shall listen with attention!" replied the young lady. "And now that we are beyond the view of the villa, I beseech you to lose no time in opening your mind to me."

"You remember all that I said to your father and yourself a few weeks ago?"

"On the very same day when that angel of goodness Agnes discovered us in our wretched abode!"

"That very same day, Corinna. You remember, I ask, what I then told you?"

"Yes, Mr. Hargrave," replied the damsel: "I remember you said that you had in other times been an intimate friend of Mr. Morton Evelyn, the father of Agnes: you also said that for this and for other reasons you experienced the greatest possible interest in Agnes—but that you had been absent for so long a time from England you knew nothing about her——"

"Yes—all this I said, Corinna; and it was because I *did* desire to know something relative to the character, disposition, habits, and pursuits of Agnes, that I availed myself of the arrangement which she had made for you to go and live with her——"

"And thus I have acted as a sort of spy upon her proceedings!" exclaimed Corinna. "But I have experienced no regret and no remorse for having done so, Mr. Hargrave," she continued; "because from the very first I felt assured that it could be nothing but a good account that I should have to give of her; for everybody could tell by a single glance at her countenance that she is an angel of goodness! And then too you assured me so positively, Mr. Hargrave, that it was entirely in Agnes' interests you were acting and that you consequently engaged my services. In short, you said that if Agnes proved to be everything you hoped, desired, and expected, you had in store for

her a source of indescribable happiness! Now, then, Mr. Hargrave," exclaimed the ingenuous and warm-hearted girl, "you see that I full well recollect everything you told my father and me on that lay when you introduced yourself to us after Agnes had taken her departure."

"And now, my dear Corinna, you are prepared to learn that I am fully satisfied with all the reports you have made to me?"

"How is it possible you could be otherwise?" ejaculated Corinna enthusiastically.

"No: it is impossible!"—and it was with almost an equal degree of enthusiasm that these words were spoken. "But tell me, Corinna—have you the slightest suspicion of what I am about to say to you? Is there in your mind a presentiment—?"

"Ah!" said Corinna, gazing earnestly up into her companion's countenance: "there have indeed been moments when I have suspected! Yes—perhaps *now* more than ever! Oh, heavens! if it were so—"

"What—what is it that you suspect, my dear girl? what is it that you think?"—and it was in a voice full of emotion that the questions were put.

"Oh! am I right in calling you Mr. Hargrave?" asked Corinna: "ought I not rather to call you by some other name? For I think—Oh! I suspect—I scarcely dare speak it—"

"Yes, yes—speak your thoughts, my dear girl! speak your thoughts freely! By so doing you may spare me the excitement of a studied revelation!"

"Oh then, if I must speak my thoughts," cried Corinna, "I should say that you are not Mr. Hargrave, the friend of the deceased Mr. Morton Evelyn—but that Mr. Morton Evelyn himself lives!—and though it seems as if I were thinking of the wild and the impossible, yet I should say that you are that same Morton Evelyn!—yes, you are the father of Agnes!"

Lord Ormsby took Corinna's hand; and pressing it in his own, he said, "My dear girl, for the goodness of heart which you have shown from the very first instant of my acquaintance with you, I wish you all possible happiness. Nay, more! I will do all I can to promote it! You have told me all your little secrets; and heaven grant that you may yet enjoy long years of bliss with the young French gentleman who has won your heart! And it is as a kinsman that I thus speak to you, Corinna!"

"Ah, then," she ejaculated, "my suspicion is correct—and you are Mr. Morton Evelyn!"

"Yes—I am he," replied Ormsby; "and I am the father of Agnes! And this day—indeed within the hour that is passing—shall I strain her in my arms!"

Tears of joy streamed down Corinna's cheeks; and she clung to Lord Ormsby's arm for support, for she was ready to sink, overpowered by the emotions that were excited within her. And then for the next quarter of an hour there was a deeply serious discourse between the nobleman and Corinna: he revealed many things to her knowledge, and he gave her instructions how she was presently to proceed in a task of the most delicate nature which he entrusted to her. They separated; and while Lord Ormsby roamed about for a

while in the neighbourhood, the scene which we are on the point of relating occurred within the walls of Sidney Villa.

Corinna returned to the garden, and took her little brother and sister indoors. Composing her countenance as well as she was able, she entered the parlour where Agnes was seated. There was always a smile and a kind word from Miss Evelyn for Corinna; and the Neapolitan girl, taking the hand of her benefactress, exclaimed with enthusiasm, "Oh, my dear Agnes! how sweet it is to receive bounties from an angel such as you!"

"My dear Corinna," she answered, "you must not address me in such language as this. I have often and often told you that you are not to consider yourself under such very great obligations to me; for at the outset I was only performing a Christian duty—and then I conceived a great liking for you—"

"I know it, dear Agnes!" interrupted Corinna, bending down and kissing our beauteous heroine's cheek. "But perhaps it is not after all so very, very astonishing that there should be this strong feeling between us; for there is a certain degree of kinship—"

"What mean you, my dear Corinna?" asked Agnes. "Kinship did you say?"

"Yes;" and now our heroine felt the two hands which retained her own, trembling nervously. "It is true, dear Agnes! You have heard me say that my mother was an Englishwoman. She belonged to the Morton family—that family which had intermarried with the Evelyns; and—and—dear Agnes!" added Corinna, diffidently and tremulously, "my poor mother was first cousin to your father!"

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Agnes, full of wonderment and delight. "How do you know that it is so? But, Ah! I am rejoiced, dear Corinna, to find a relative in one whom I already loved! Alas, my poor father, who has so long been dead—"

"Say not so, dear Agnes!" interjected Corinna. "Long lost to you, no doubt;—but not dead!"

"Corinna!" ejaculated our heroine, starting up, full of nervous trepidation, from her seat, "there is something more in all this than I can anticipate! What do you mean? Tell me, my dear friend!—keep me not in suspense, I conjure you!"

"Have you never thought, dear Agnes, that it is possible your father might be alive?" asked Corinna.

"Yes—possible! just possible! *barely* possible!" rejoined Agnes, with feverish excitement; and then she instantaneously added in a mournful tone, "But by no means probable!"

"And why not probable, Agnes?" inquired Corinna.

"Good heavens! if you know something," cried our heroine, "speak! speak! And now I again think you do! Oh, yes! it again strikes me that there is something significant in your words and in your looks! Tell me, Corinna—"

"Pray do not excite yourself, dear Agnes!" interrupted the Neapolitan girl. "I was only saying that such strange things take place in this world—such, for instance, as the discovery that there is a certain bond of kinship between yourself and me—"



ANOTHER PORTRAIT OF AGNES.

"Ah! you have not told me," exclaimed Agnes, "how this discovery was made?"

"Forgive me, my sweet friend!" said Corinna, throwing her arms round our heroine's neck, "when I tell you that I have known it for some weeks!"

"For some weeks?" cried Agnes in amazement.

"Yes—ever since the day when I first met you," rejoined Corinna.

"I cannot understand it!" ejaculated Agnes. "I feel as if you were speaking with the knowledge of something that is as yet unknown to me! Oh, Corinna! you are incapable of any studied deception—without a sufficient reason——"

"And perhaps, dearest Agnes, I may have had a sufficient reason to deceive you!"—and she pressed her beautiful vermilion lips to the damask cheek of our heroine.

No. 75.—AGNES.

"Oh! then I am indeed hovering upon the brink of some revelation!" exclaimed Agnes. "But I conjure you to tell me whether you have evil or good news?"

"God forbid," cried Corinna, enthusiastically, "that I should have evil tidings for you, my sweet cousin!"

"Cousin? Yes! you are my cousin if your mother were indeed so nearly allied to my poor father! But you have known it ever since we first met, Corinna? you have thus known it for six long weeks?"

"It was a secret which I was most strictly desired to keep," rejoined Corinna. "Mr. Hargrave——"

"Mr. Hargrave?" echoed Agnes. "Why, that was the gentleman who brought over the document which effected old Mr. Barrington's release!"

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"The very same," answered Corinna. "You noticed him particularly the other day, you know—"

"Good heavens, my dear cousin!" cried Agnes, "is your brain wandering? You actually frighten me! I do not know Mr. Hargrave! I only heard Winifred speak of him! You know Winifred—Mrs. Roderick Dalham? I think I have introduced you to her?"

"Yes," said Corinna. "But do you not recollect the tall gentleman in black—"

"Whom we saw in the Regent's Park?" cried Agnes. "Yes! I remember him well!"

"And that was Mr. Hargrave," rejoined Corinna.

"You knew it? and you did not say so? Oh, there is a strange mystery in all this!"

"Very strange, my dear Agnes; for his name is not—No," said Corinna, interrupting herself, and proceeding cautiously and slowly,—"his name is not Mr. Hargrave after all—"

"Then who is he?" asked Agnes, turning very pale and trembling. "I see, my dear cousin, that all you have been saying is to prepare me for some startling revelation! And then, the way that you have introduced the name of Mr. Hargrave—the next moment telling me that it is not his name! And, Oh!" cried Agnes, her feelings now being worked up to the extreme verge of tension, "who could have told you that you were a relation of mine, unless it were—But heavens! Corinna! tell me, I beseech you—"

"Oh, prepare yourself, dearest Agnes! prepare yourself," said the Neapolitan girl entreatingly, "for a revelation so wild and wonderful—involving something that is but one step below the supernatural—as if the dead had come to life and the long-lost were found!"

A cry burst from the lips of Agnes, and she fainted in Corinna's arms. The young lady rang the bell: Rachel hastened to answer the summons; and while restoratives were being administered, Corinna hastily whispered a few words of astounding revelation to the ears of the worthy woman.

"I now go to fetch her father!" said Corinna. "Prepare her fully!—yes, prepare her fully to meet him!—the dead who is alive! the long-lost who is found! Prepare her to meet him, not as plain Mr. Murton Evelyn!—but prepare her to learn that she is the scion of aristocracy—that her father never was an impostor nor a pretender—but that he is Lord Ormsby!"

Rachel promised to fulfil Corinna's injunctions; and the Neapolitan girl, hastening to slip on her bonnet and shawl, again glided through the garden, and passed out of the iron gate. At a little distance she beheld Lord Ormsby, who was anxiously awaiting her return. She flew towards him; and almost breathless with her emotions, she gasped forth, "You may come, my lord! you may come!"

It would be impossible to convey an adequate idea of the scene which presently took place, when the daughter was clasped in the father's arms—when again and again, and yet again he strained her to his heart—when he imprinted a thousand kisses on her brow—or when he surveyed her with all a parent's pride and admiration, knowing that she was as pure and virtuous as she was beautiful

—spotless in character as she was chaste in the very name which she bore! And that name of *Agnes*,—Oh, with what emotion was it breathed from the father's lips!—and how he wept and sobbed with all the varied feelings which this meeting was but too well calculated to excite! And on her side, what emotions were experienced by the lovely daughter!—what bliss filled her soul! and then what doubts took possession of her mind!—doubts lest this were only a mere dream, too bright and beautiful to last!

Rachel had retired; but Corinna was present. She would have withdrawn also, to leave the father and daughter together, but that Lord Ormsby himself bade her remain—for he was afraid lest the effect of this meeting might be almost more than Agnes could endure, after having already experienced one swoon.

But for the lovely girl happiness had a powerful vitality; and when all the doubts were banished from her mind—when she saw that it was no dream, but that it was all a reality—she abandoned herself as it were to the tide of bliss on which her soul was now floating,—that tide which was so clear! that soul which was so stainless! For, Oh! to know a father's love, she who had never before known it!—to greet a father's return when she had believed such return impossible!—*this* was a happiness as great as if the heart were rejoicing because the very grave itself had given up its dead! To be brief, the happiness which Agnes now experienced, was such that though we have endeavoured to heap some sentences together in order to describe it, 'tis nevertheless something which defies *all* description, and is not to be embodied in the shape of any language known to the human race!

For an hour sat that father and that daughter, with their young cousin—saying a thousand things—wishing to give explanations concerning the past, yet not knowing at what point to begin—and over and over again feeling their hearts too full for any further utterance! And again and again a long and fervid embrace was taken; and the sire contemplated the daughter with looks of pride, admiration, and love—and the daughter contemplated the parent with a joy so heartfelt—an affection so deep—that all the best sentiments of which the human soul is susceptible, seemed concentrated therein! Again and again must we say that it was a scene which no power of language can describe.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AGNES AND HER FATHER.

At length the violence of the first gush of feeling subsided somewhat—the very strength of those highly wrought emotions expended itself; and the father and daughter became enabled to converse in a more tranquillised and deliberate manner than they had as yet done. And now it was that Corinna Paoli seized an opportune moment to glide away from the apartment; for she naturally felt that this father and this daughter must have much to say to each other—an infinite variety of explanations to give, and an incalculable number of communications mutually to make. It was some time

however before Lord Ormsby and Agnes noticed that Corinna had disappeared, so little were their senses now susceptible of anything that was occurring beyond the sphere in which all their own thoughts, feelings, and emotions were agitating.

"You will ask me, my dear child," said Lord Ormsby, "wherefore I have neglected you for so many long years—wherefore I had abandoned you—and why I remained afar off in another hemisphere, as if totally regardless of your existence in the world? But you must know, dearest Agnes, that my mind has been in so morbid a state—my brain has been so affected, that if I have not been absolutely mad the whole time—outrageously insane—I have at least been the victim of a monomania so complete that it rendered me a cynic and a misanthrope. By brooding over my sorrows and my wrongs, I was led on to the settled conviction that all the world had turned its face against me—that there was a sort of league on the part of the whole human race to persecute me; and especially did I hold in abhorrence the sex to which you belong, Agnes! Oh! it is a frightful thing when the mind becomes so warped and attenuated that every image which is reflected upon the disc of its inward vision becomes distorted so that the fairest shape takes an aspect the most monstrous, and the loveliest beings seem the most hideous and revolting!"

"For heaven's sake, dear father, speak not in this strain!" murmured Agnes, the tears flowing down her damask cheeks. "You must no longer look upon the past!—you must think only of the happiness of the present—and you must entertain every hope for the future!"

"Yes, my beloved child," answered Ormsby, kissing away those tears from his beautiful daughter's cheeks, "there is indeed happiness for the present, and there is every hope for the felicity of the future! But it is absolutely necessary, Agnes, that we should converse upon certain topics, and that there should be explanations between us. You must now know all that concerns the past of my life:—for this once, Agnes, will we speak of all these things—and in so doing we must look upon it as a disagreeable task which circumstances necessitate, and which will leave our minds lightened as it were from a burden when it is performed. Besides, my dear Agnes, I am well assured that you can only have a dim knowledge of those incidents which cast a sudden blight upon my existence—drove me from my home—exiled me from my native land—and made me a wanderer, under a feigned name, amidst the strangers of another hemisphere!"

"And Oh, my dear father!" gently whispered Agnes, "if it be absolutely necessary that you should tell me all these things, rest assured that you will receive the tenderest sympathy of your loving daughter for all the sorrows that you may have experienced!"

Lord Ormsby proceeded to explain to Agnes the details of those transactions in connexion with the deceased Mr. Waldron which have been so fully recorded in the opening chapters of our tale. As his lordship supposed, Agnes had indeed but a dim and vague knowledge of those events; and it was now therefore with a fearful interest that she listened to the recital.

"And why did I fly from England?" said her

father: "why did I flee from my home, to be heard of no more? In the first place, dearest Agnes, I was resolved not to be the supporter of a tremendous cheat from the moment that I had discovered it; but on the other hand my pride would not suffer me to remain to look the world in the face and bear all the ridicule which would have been inevitably thrown upon me! Nay, more—I dreaded lest it should not even be fancied that I was a dupe, but that I was either the sole concocter of a villainous fraud, or the willing accomplice of designing persons! And then too, there were my father-in-law's terrific threats that he would throw all the blame upon me—that he would make me appear to be the villain in order to clear and exonerate himself; and Oh! I shuddered at the idea of dungeons and chains, of prisons and of gibbets; for at that time, Agnes," added Lord Ormsby in a sombre tone, "forgery was punished with death!"

"Oh, dearest father!" cried the young maiden, flinging her arms about her sire's neck; "it was no wonder that you fled from your home and the land of your birth,—abandoning wife, child—everything!"

"Oh! if I had not believed that the wife of whom I was so proud, was an accomplice in her father's iniquity, I might perhaps have remained!—yes, I might have remained!" cried Ormsby. "But when I thought that she was no longer worthy of either my respect or my love, I felt as if my last hope on earth was gone!—as if the only tie which had continued to bind me to my country and my home had been suddenly severed! It was as a desperate man that I fled. For, Oh! not even *thine* image, sweet infant as thou then wast! could constitute another bond to hold me to my home! No, no! All the worst that I thought of your unhappy mother, was suddenly reflected as it were upon thee! And so I went away; and for nineteen years, Agnes, I have suffered intervals of anguish or else of an entire numbing of the soul's sensibilities, such as no language can describe! My God! and this day I have discovered that my poor wife—your mother Honoria—was not so culpable after all. No—it was only in a moment of mental aberration, so to speak, that she became the accomplice of her father's iniquitous intentions! If I had known it before—if there had only been the slightest whisper to waft the word to me across the Atlantic, and to breathe in my ear that Honoria loved me, that she was penitent, and while pressing thee to her bosom, she was calling in agony upon God to send back a husband and a father to the home which he had deserted,—Oh! I should have returned. I should have returned!—and long, long ere this, dearest Agnes—yes, even in thy smiling infancy, wouldst thou have experienced a father's love—a sire's tenderness!"

Agnes was now weeping softly but plentifully. the tears were likewise trickling down the cheeks of her father. There was a long silence; and then Lord Ormsby, suddenly straining the beautiful girl to his heart, murmured, "Weep not, dearest Agnes: for, Oh! if the spirits of the departed are allowed to look down upon those whom they loved and left upon earth, your poor mother may smile with placid joy at the certainty that her memory is no longer thought of unlovingly by me!"

There was another pause; and then Lord Ormsby went on to say, "In casting a retrospective glance over my life, Agnes, there is a period of two or three years which seems as if it were covered by a black veil, not altogether impervious to the sight, but through which the mental vision can only penetrate dimly and imperfectly. That period of my life remains not an entire blank in my memory; but its incidents are only seen in mere sketchy outlines or uncertain shapeless forms, as objects that are seen through a mist. That period of three years to which I refer, Agnes, was the interval that immediately succeeded my flight from England and my transit over the Atlantic. Shudder not, dearest!—but—but—with fortitude arm yourself—while you learn that for three years I was the inmate of—of—I can scarcely speak it—an asylum—you understand me—in New York!"

A shriek escaped from the lips of Agnes; horror was expressed in her eyes; and her cheeks became deadly pale as she again threw her arms about her father's neck; and then she burst forth into a flood of tears, mingled with convulsive sobs. It was some time before the feelings of either the father or daughter were sufficiently composed to enable the former to continue his narrative.

"My dearest Agnes," he at length said, "you can understand me fully when I assure you that I am not telling you all these things to harrow up your feelings or to plunge daggers into your sensitive heart: but it is a needful though a painful task which I am fulfilling. You must know everything connected with my bygone career; or else if you comprehended not what has been the state of my mind for so many long, long years, you would not hold me guiltless nor my conduct venial in having abandoned you. Nay, interrupt me not!—but listen, I beseech you! Yes—for three whole years was I an inmate of that place,—not because I was veritably mad, for I was harmless; but because I had been found a wanderer in the streets of New York—penniless, starving—without any document about me to show who I was—and obstinately maintaining a profound silence when questioned."

"Just heaven, dear father! how you must have suffered!" murmured Agnes, again weeping.

"And then," hastily pursued Lord Ormsby, "on being emancipated from that place, I was taken by a benevolent hand and introduced as a clerk into a counting-house, where I remained for some months, doing my duty—that is to say, performing whatsoever tasks that were set me, with a mechanical precision. About that time the plague was raging in New Orleans—decimating the population, and rendering that great southern city a scene of horror and mourning. The mercantile firm at New York had large transactions with New Orleans: it suddenly became of vital importance to send an agent to that southern city; but no one would go to encounter (as it was supposed) an almost certain death. At that crisis I offered my services. Of what value was my life? I could afford to trifle with it—to stake it upon any venture—because I recked not for it! I went to New Orleans. It was while there,—yes, methinks it was *there*, if my memory do not fail me—that I chanced to receive from an English traveller some intelligence relative to those whom I had left be-

hind in my native land nearly four years previous. I learnt that my father-in-law had committed suicide, and that my wife was dead. This was all that I could ascertain; for my informant was but slightly acquainted with the circumstances of the case, and the discourse arose by one of those accidents which occasionally occur within the experience of everybody. I should add that the Englishman entertained not the slightest idea how deeply interested I was in the matters whereof he was conversing. The plague continued to rage at New Orleans—the terrible cholera, converting whole streets into sepulchres and carrying desolation into thousands of homes! But it spared me; and I was enabled to render the most important services to the mercantile firm which I represented in that southern city. On my return to New York, my employers presented me with a sum of money, which if represented in English coin, would amount to about eight hundred pounds. I quitted their service: I was getting disgusted with the haunts of men and with mankind itself. I beheld selfishness everywhere; and I longed to flee afar from human society. I thought of pushing off into the Far West—clearing for myself a place in the midst of one of the great primeval forests, and there establishing my anchorite home. And thus I became a wanderer through tracks where daily and hourly I incurred a myriad dangers. There was the Red Indian burning to possess himself of my scalp; while the rattle of the deadly reptile continuously warned me that wheresoever I lay down to rest, my eyes might close in a slumber whence there should be no awakening!"

"Oh, father! dear father!" shudderingly murmured Agnes, as she nestled like a timid bird closer to her sire's breast.

"And yet I passed scathless through these and countless other perils, which must be encountered by those," pursued Lord Ormsby, "who plunge into the wild regions of the Far West. For years I wandered there—sometimes settling for weeks in little villages or hamlets, on which I unexpectedly stumbled as it were amidst those primeval forests—sometimes abiding in caves hollowed by nature in the rock. At last I became wearied of this existence, and I began to think that I had no right to separate myself so completely from the great mass of human society. By a strange revulsion of feeling my heart began to yearn towards my species, and I fancied that by doing good to others I should be pouring a balm into the wounds of my own soul. And so I went back into the great cities and towns of the American Union. I visited prisons and madhouses—I was never wearied of listening to tales of distress in order that I might relieve the narrators. Thus, in less than a twelvemonth after my return from the far-off places of nature's primeval barbarism to those scenes of civilization, my purse was emptied; and the reflections which were then forced upon my mind began to diminish the philanthropy of my feelings. I saw where I had been duped; I comprehended where I had been imposed upon: and at the same time I received several practical illustrations of the ingratitude of those who had been the recipients of my bounty. I went to New York: I made my way to the offices of the mercantile firm by which I had been previously employed; but there I found that nothing could be

done for me. I was coldly received. 'I might have remained in their service; but the moment I had got their money I had left them. For years they had heard nothing of me: they did not know what I might have been doing in the interval. They would therefore rather not renew the connexion.' Such was the language that was held towards me. I went elsewhere, soliciting employment; for it was actually the means of subsistence that I now needed. And I found employment,—mean and poor it is true, but still productive of sufficient to give me my bread. Again, after the lapse of two or three years, I realized a sum of money:—again I left New York, and bent my restless steps through the Union. But this time I gave no slims and suffered myself to be moved by no tale of distress. I became completely cynical. After a while I arrived a second time at New Orleans. The cholera was again raging there; and I can scarcely tell what morbid feeling it was that induced me to penetrate into that city of desolation. Perhaps it was to fling a cartel at Death himself! But no matter. Thither I went: and I beheld an opportunity of turning to advantage the little money which remained to me; for Death broke up some of the oldest and grandest establishments—and the same cause which filled the cemeteries with corpses, glutted the markets with goods. Well, to be brief, I made some money; and after a while I went and settled in Jamaica. Many long years had then passed since I left England—Oh! so many years that I scarcely dared look back upon them!—and if ever there were a yearning in my heart to institute inquiries relative to one who might possibly be alive in my native land—I allude to yourself, dear Agnes!—there was another feeling, sternly morbid, cynical, and unnatural, which spoke as it were with a loud voice in my soul, proclaiming the word *No!* And thus time passed on, and circumstances threw me in the way of Gustavus Barrington. Oh! conceive, my dear Agnes, how strongly a certain chord was touched in my heart when Gustavus, in speaking of his uncle's affairs, chanced to mention the name of Timperley! A thousand memories of the past were conjured up; and knowing Timperley to be a villain, I resolved to take some measures to put old Mr. Barrington on his guard against him. In this I succeeded. Well, Gustavus went to England; and then he returned to Jamaica again. After a while my acquaintance was renewed with him; and then it was that providence made him the instrument of placing in my hands a document which showed me at once that after all I was no impostor, but that the title and the revenues of the Evelyns of Ormsby were indeed all legally mine own. Oh, *then* what a revulsion of feeling took place within me!"

"I can well understand it, dearest father!" exclaimed Agnes, now embracing him with renewed effusions of joy; for the affectionate girl had been all along identifying herself with her sire in everything he had undergone, felt, and suffered.

"Yes," continued Ormsby, "everything now suddenly appeared to me under a different aspect. The whole world had abruptly changed its hue, as if it were a kaleidoscope that I was surveying. Might there not be yet a something worth living for? Perhaps you, my child, still existed! It was thus that I thought within myself. Then

away to England I sped, the bearer of an important document which was to accomplish old Mr. Barrington's release. I called upon Wicifred: she mentioned your name—the name of Miss Evelyn! Good heavens! what sensations took possession of me! I cannot explain what my feelings were when I inquired the Christian name of that Miss Evelyn to whom she had just alluded. It was Agnes! Ah, then it was my own daughter!—there could be no doubt of it! I learnt where you lived; and that very same afternoon I made a thousand inquiries concerning you in this neighbourhood. But enough on that point for the present! Other inquiries I instituted in respect to the past: I found that no legal proceedings had ever been taken against me by the Government—that all which concerned me at the time when I fled from England, was more or less enveloped in mystery—and that as so little was known in reference to the real motives which had induced me to flee, my claims might now be prosecuted without much chance of reviving scandal or evil reports, and without the danger of throwing opprobrium on the memories of the dead. And now, Agnes," added Lord Ormsby, "I think that I have nothing more to say,—unless it be to tell you that for the present I am shrouding all my proceedings in secrecy, because I wish not to be known to the world at large until the formal recognition of my claims shall place me at once upon that social pinnacle which I must henceforth occupy."

"And now, dearest father," said Agnes, "that you have told me of all you have gone through and of all you have suffered, promise me—Oh! promise me, that the subject shall be revived no more, and that the unpleasant task being accomplished, it shall not again enter amongst the topics of our discourse!"

"Rest assured, Agnes," answered Lord Ormsby, "that I shall be only too glad to bury the past in oblivion, while enjoying the happiness of the present. Alas, that your cousin Floribel should not be here!"

"Oh, poor Floribel!" murmured Agnes, with tears in her eyes. "Think not too harshly of her! I have every reason to suppose that she is completely penitent—that she is dwelling in some seclusion—and that she is unflinchingly pursuing the path of virtue into which she has returned. But, my dear father," said Agnes, as a sudden idea seemed to strike her, and while a blush crossed her beautiful countenance—yet it was with the most ingenuous frankness that her large blue eyes were turned upon her sire, as she went on to say, "You have evidently made many, many inquiries concerning all in whom you were in any way interested. Has it come to your knowledge that I have accepted the attentions of a young gentleman—"

"Yes—Mr. De Vere," responded Lord Ormsby. "Corinna told me this much. Ah! believe me, dearest Agnes, Corinna is a generous-hearted girl—truthful in character and sincere in disposition! She loves you—"

"And you know that I love her well in return," replied Agnes. "But may I hope, dearest father, that you are not in any way dissatisfied at the engagement into which I have entered with Charles De Vere?"

"You love him, my dear child," said Lord

Ormsby; "and from all I have learnt concerning him, he is a chivalrous-minded, high-spirited, well-principled young man. I long to make his acquaintance."

"Oh, I am rejoiced to hear you speak thus, dear father!" exclaimed Agnes: "for I am sure that you will be well pleased with Charles De Vere. Would you like to see the letters that he has from time to time written to me? They are here!"

Agnes started up from her seat by her father's side; and hastening to open a writing-desk, she produced a packet of letters tied round with a piece of silk. With the most ingenuous frankness she advanced towards her sire, saying, "Take them, dear father, and read them at your leisure. I know Charles will not be offended that I gave you his letters to read. But—but," she added, while a modest blush again overspread her countenance, "be sure to restore them to me, dear father!"

"Admirable girl!" exclaimed Lord Ormsby, folding her to his breast: "what joy, what happiness thus to find so much innocence and virtue in the child who is restored to me! No—not for worlds would I read those letters, Agnes! I know that you are incapable of permitting the addresses or the correspondence of one who is unworthy of you; and therefore I am convinced there is not a line in those letters on which the eye of purity itself may not linger lovingly. But I will tell you what I purpose to do, Agnes," continued Lord Ormsby, while his daughter replaced the letters in the writing-desk. "I intend to set off for Italy, and make myself acquainted with Charles De Vere. But that is not my only motive. It is evident, from what he has communicated to you concerning Floribel, he either knows where she is to be found, or he may obtain some clue to the seclusion into which she has retired. Erring though she be, I cannot forget that she is my niece—the daughter of my wife Honoria's sister!—and it is my duty to do all I can to reclaim her. Yes—she must not be suffered to remain abroad in the world by herself, either an outcast in her own estimation, or else perhaps exposed to fresh temptation! No, no! this must not be! Your erring cousin shall be restored to you; and we will sustain her in whatsoever good resolutions she may have formed, in the same way that we may likewise minister to her mental tranquillity and happiness!"

The reader may easily comprehend how joyously welcome were these assurances to Agnes who so dotingly loved her cousin Floribel. For a moment her spirits were damped by learning that she was about to be separated from the father to whom she was only just restored: but triumphing over this feeling, for the momentary selfishness of which she blamed herself, she expressed her warmest thanks for the interest manifested by her sire on Floribel's behalf.

"And when do you think of departing, dear father?" she inquired.

"In a few days, Agnes," he responded. "I must not immediately tear myself away from you. Besides, there are certain little forms and ceremonies which I have to go through at some of the Government offices in asserting my claims. The business will be quickly settled:—of this there is no doubt; and fortunately I have no difficulty in procuring the funds that I require for my imme-

diate expenses. Otherwise I should indeed be poor: for the money which I had about me when I landed in England, was not a very formidable sum, I can assure you. I must tell you a coincidence, Agnes. Reverting for a moment to that period whereof we have been speaking—I mean nineteen years ago—there was at that time a fashionable gentleman about town, of the name of Stafford, who courted my acquaintance so soon as he found that I claimed the titles and estates of Ormsby. Ah! I remember full well, it was he who introduced me to an aristocratic and exclusive club where first I was welcomed as a brother-peer by some of the proudest nobles of England! Well then, this Mr. Stafford now holds a high Government appointment in one of the very offices through which my claims must pass. I made myself known to him almost immediately on my return to England: I threw myself upon his friendship—in confidence I told him everything. His conduct has been most noble: his purse has been open to me—and it is now through his influence that my business will be expedited to a prompt issue."

"Oh, how I rejoice, my dear father," exclaimed Agnes, "that you should have found so kind a friend!"

"And now tell me, Agnes," said Lord Ormsby, "about Winifred Barrington. When I called upon her on my first arrival in England, I promised to return: but so many matters have since occupied my attention, that I have been unable to fulfil my pledge. And perhaps there was another reason——"

"Then you do not know, father," said Agnes, "that Winifred's cousin Gustavus came over from Jamaica?"

"What! again?" ejaculated Ormsby.

"Yes. He must have followed close upon you, dear father; for if I remember right, it was the very next day after you called on Winifred that Gustavus presented himself; and then his wife appeared——"

"Ah! the quadroon Emily!" cried Lord Ormsby. "She followed him, you say?"

"Yes, father; and there was a most unpleasant scene—and the quadroon took her husband away with her. They have not since been heard of—or at least I believe not. But I have not seen much of Winifred lately——"

Agnes stopped short; and Lord Ormsby said, "I have neglected that poor young woman in not calling upon her again according to promise. I happened, however, to see a paragraph in the newspaper to the effect that Mr. Barrington was liberated from the debtor's prison in which he had so long languished; and I therefore suppose that his affectionate granddaughter is residing with him?"

"Alas, no!" answered Agnes in a mournful tone. "The truth is, my dear father, that poor Winifred is very unhappy, and also very unfortunate. I cannot help thinking that the conduct of her grandfather has been most cruel and harsh towards her——"

"I am sorry to hear this, Agnes," interjected Lord Ormsby. "I have felt interested in that young person; and to tell you the real truth, I should have called upon her long ere this, only that I thought it probable I might encounter

you at her abode — and I was resolved not to recognize you as my daughter until I should have obtained the fullest certainty of your worthiness. And that was why I was in no hurry for a few weeks to assert my claims formally to the Government; for I was resolved that if as the result of the measures which I adopted to fathom your true character and pursuits, I should have found you unworthy, I would have sacrificed all earthly titles and riches rather than have rendered you the sharer of them. But, Oh! my dear Agnes, you are in every way worthy of all my most devoted love as your parent; and I am as proud as I am fond of you! But let us again speak of Winifred. You say that her grandfather's conduct has been cruel and harsh?"

"Yes—after all the sacrifices which she made on behalf of her aged relative," replied Agnes. "It is a very great secret, father—but of course I can tell it to you—a very great secret indeed! To no other living soul would I breathe it, unless with Winifred's consent. But her name is no longer Barrington——"

"Ah! then she is married?" ejaculated Ormsby.

"Yes—married, and without her grandfather's consent; and her husband is the son of his most bitter enemy. In a word, she is Mrs. Dalham!"

"But surely the old man will not prove unrelenting?"

"Alas, I fear that he is very vindictive," rejoined Agnes. "There was a terrible scene when Winifred announced this marriage to her grandfather a day or two after his release from prison. The old man first gave vent to cries of rage and execration; and then he fell down in a fit, the blood gushing from his mouth; and for three days he never spoke. Winifred attended him as assiduously and unweariedly as if his conduct had been of the kindest and most generous description towards her, and as if she had nothing to dread in bringing him back to life again. But when he regained his consciousness, it was only to overwhelm her with reproaches and to drive her from his presence. Since that day his door has remained closed against her. Vainly has she endeavoured to obtain admittance. And I must tell you, my dear father," added Agnes, "that I myself called upon Mr. Barrington to intercede on his granddaughter's behalf; for I was present at the marriage ceremony which took place last February——"

"And did Mr. Barrington resist even *your* entreaties, Agnes?" asked Ormsby.

"Alas, yes! — and Winifred is overwhelmed with grief! She will shortly become a mother——"

"And where does she live?" inquired Ormsby.

"She occupies a neat little residence in Kentish Town," answered Agnes. "Her husband is with her as much as possible——"

"What! does he not dwell with her altogether?" inquired Ormsby, in astonishment.

"No; for Sir John Dalham suspects not his son Roderick's marriage; and all the concession which Winifred could possibly obtain from her grandfather, was that the secret should be kept. Roderick Dalham would not for the world that the marriage should come to his sire's ears!"

"Ah! then, Sir John Dalham is as much irritated against Mr. Barrington as Mr. Barrington can possibly be against the Baronet?"

"Quite as much," answered Agnes. "It seems to be as deadly a rancour in respect to the hearts' feelings as it has been a fierce struggle in the arena of the law-courts."

"And when is the great Chancery suit to be decided?" asked Lord Ormsby.

"In a few days judgment will be pronounced," replied Agnes. "Mr. Roderick Dalham feels sure that the sentence will be given against his father; and as Sir John is in a very enfeebled state of health—indeed I believe confined to his bed—Roderick dreads the effect which any sudden excitement, particularly if it be of so evil character, may have over him."

"So that if the loss of the lawsuit," observed Ormsby, "happen to be accompanied by the knowledge that Roderick was secretly wedded to Winifred, the old Baronet would sink beneath——Ah!" he suddenly ejaculated, "who comes?"

The parlour-door opened; and Mr. Timperley made his appearance.

"I beg you a thousand pardons, my lord," said the lawyer, with a very obsequious bow. "I need not ask whether my young friend Agnes is happy in having found a father? Or perhaps I ought to call her the Hon. Miss Evelyn——"

"Might I ask, Mr. Timperley," interrupted Lord Ormsby, with a cold severity of look and tone, "what brings you hither at this particular moment?"

"I have received letters from my niece Cicely," answered Mr. Timperley: "they arrived by this morning's post—but I had not found leisure to open them before I was honoured with your lordship's presence at noon. The packet contained a letter for Miss Evelyn; and as it happened that some little business was bringing me up into this quarter of the world, I thought that I might just as well become the bearer of the letter and avail myself of the opportunity to pay my respects to Miss Evelyn."

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Timperley," said Agnes; but her manner was reserved and distant—for within the last hour or two she had heard more of the lawyer's real character than she had ever known before or could possibly have suspected.

"I think you will find," said Mr. Timperley, as he handed the letter—and he did not choose to suffer it to appear that he perceived any difference in the manner of Agnes towards himself,— "I think you will find that Cicely tells you she has sent you two or three beautiful specimens of Italian sculpture, the arrival of which you may expect in due course. She knows that you are attached to the fine arts——"

"I am exceedingly obliged to Mrs. Hardress," said Agnes, her tone becoming completely friendly while she was thus alluding to Cicely, "for thinking of me."

There was then a brief pause, during which Mr. Timperley fidgeted about close by the door, with his hat in his hand; for he had not been invited to sit down.

"My daughter is very much obliged to you, Mr. Timperley," said Lord Ormsby, "for becoming the bearer of the letter: but we hope you will now excuse us."

"Oh, certainly! certainly!" exclaimed the lawyer. "I can very well understand that you

must have plenty to say to each other. I hope I am not intruding, my lord! I scarcely fancied that I should have found you here—I thought that you might not have called yet—”

“I have been here for the last two hours, Mr. Timperley,” said the nobleman, with a look and tone sufficiently indicating his desire that the lawyer would take his departure.

“I am sure,” said Timperley, keeping his ground near the door, but still fidgeting about with his hat,—“I’m sure I wish you both all possible happiness and prosperity. Miss Evelyn will tell you, my lord, that Mrs. Timperley and myself have always to the utmost of our power shown her every attention—and likewise to her cousin, poor dear Floribel; and if anything had ever happened to place either of them in want of a home, they would have found it with Mrs. Timperley and myself.”

“I am obliged to you for these assurances,” said Ormsby; “but it is fortunate that my daughter, at least, has not required any other home than that which her own means have enabled her to afford.”

Mr. Timperley could not possibly find an excuse for obtruding his presence any longer: he therefore bowed and took his leave.

“That man,” said Lord Ormsby, as soon as he and his daughter were again alone together, “did not come merely to bring you the letter.”

“You think not, dear father?” said Agnes inquisitively.

“No—I am convinced that he had another motive, and that the letter was the pretext. He could have sent you the letter by post. But he wanted to see how he would be received if he presented himself at Sidney Villa: he was anxious to know whether I would enter so far into the details of the past intrigues, as to make you think differently of him than hitherto. He is full of cunning, that man! It is his interest to penetrate as deeply as possible into the concerns of all with whom he comes in contact. It is by these means—by knowing precisely what every individual thinks of him—by being aware of the extent to which his past iniquities may be known in different quarters—that he shapes his course. In a word, it is vitally necessary to the species of morbid existence which he leads, that he should obtain as great an insight as possible into all the affairs that are passing around him. But read that letter, Agnes,” added Lord Ormsby; “and see whether it be really of any importance.”

The Hon. Miss Evelyn broke the seal of the epistle, and perused its contents.

“It is nothing of any importance,” she said. “It is a very kind and friendly letter; and it conveys the intimation already given us by Mr. Timperley in respect to the Italian marbles.”

“Ah! when I bethink me,” ejaculated the nobleman, “how was it that Mr. Timperley obtained access hither just now? Are not your servants in the habit of introducing visitors in a becoming and proper manner?”

“Most assuredly, my dear father,” rejoined Agnes. “And now that you mention it, I myself am surprised that Mr. Timperley should have entered unannounced. I will go and inquire.”

Agnes accordingly left the apartment; and in a few minutes she returned, saying, “No one saw

Mr. Timperley, at all: he neither knocked nor rang. But Corinna now remembers that she left the front door open when she introduced you, my dear father, into the house.”

“And thus,” said Ormsby, “Mr. Timperley walked in unceremoniously,—doubtless apprehending that if he addressed himself to a servant he would be informed that you were engaged, and his object in seeking our presence when we were together would have been defeated. We must beware of this man.”

After a little more conversation, Lord Ormsby affectionately embraced his daughter; he also took leave of Corinna; and he issued from the house. Proceeding to the nearest stand for public vehicles, he took a cab and ordered the driver to proceed to Aldersgate Street. Alighting at Mrs. Slater’s house, he inquired if Mr. Barrington were at home. The reply was in the affirmative; and Lord Ormsby said, “Be pleased to introduce me to Mr. Barrington’s presence.”

“I must take up your name first, if you please, sir,” said the servant-maid; “for Mr. Barrington is very particular as to who he admits.”

“Ah, I perceive!” thought Ormsby within himself; “he is afraid lest Roderick Dalham should procure access to him!—Well,” he continued, addressing himself to the girl, “you may say a gentleman named Hargrave wishes to speak to Mr. Barrington.”

The servant disappeared for a couple of minutes—at the expiration of which time she returned for the purpose of ushering Lord Ormsby up into the drawing-room, where Mr. Barrington was seated. The nobleman now beheld for the first time the ex-prisoner of Whitecross Street. Mr. Barrington looked very thin, pale, and ill; he stooped more than ever—and his emaciated frame had lost that wiry vigour which was wont to characterize it. He looked eighty years of age: that is to say, about nine or ten years older than he really was. He rose feebly and with difficulty from his chair as the visitor entered the room; and extending his hand, he exclaimed in a voice which was querulous and petulant in its tones, “Walk in, Mr. Hargrave—walk in. I am glad to see you, sir! I have to thank you for more than one act of kindness. Pray sit down. You sent me the warning letter about that rascal Timperley—and you brought over the document which was necessary to get me out of prison.”

“I hope I find you in good health, Mr. Barrington,” said Lord Ormsby, as he took a seat.

“Good health?” answered the old man, now with an unmistakable querulousness in temper as well as in tone. “I never shall be in good health again. How can I, after a long imprisonment—and—”

“I miss a countenance,” interrupted the nobleman, “which I expected to behold here. I allude to that most excellent of young women—*one* who made so many, many sacrifices for you—whose very name has almost become a proverb with all who happened to be acquainted with the history of your imprisonment—”

“Well, well, sir—we won’t speak of that,” interrupted old Barrington. “You will take some wine, Mr. Hargrave?”

Ormsby refused; but the old man insisted so much that he ultimately said he would accept of



Mr. Barrington's hospitality. The bell was rung, and wine was placed upon the table.

"May I be permitted to ask after Miss Barrington?" said Lord Ormsby presently; for as a matter of course he affected to be ignorant of her marriage and of her grandsire's displeasure.

"Oh, yes—you may ask, Mr. Hargrave! you may ask, to be sure!" replied Mr. Barrington, with a species of saturnine bitterness. "I went in to see Robus to-day; and he asked—and the turnkeys asked—and everybody else asked—and my only surprise is the policemen don't stop me in the streets and ask!"

"You ought to feel highly flattered, Mr. Barrington," said Ormsby, "for you perceive how much your granddaughter is loved and respected, and what a general interest she inspires. Permit me therefore to renew my inquiries concerning her?"

"Oh, she is very well—for anything I know. I mean to say—But how do you like this port?"

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"It is very excellent," replied Lord Ormsby. "But in reference to your granddaughter——"

"The port was made me a present by Mr. Wardour the barrister," hastily interjected the old man. "Come, come, fill your glass."

"Thank you—I will do so. But shall I have the pleasure of paying my respects to Miss Barrington presently?"

The old man gave a sudden start, as if struggling against some impetuous or infuriate feeling; then he looked very hard at Lord Ormsby for nearly a minute; and then he literally yelled forth, "No! you won't see her—and I have a strong suspicion you know that you won't! Come, sir—don't let us have any beating about the bush—but tell me quickly and candidly at once——"

The old man stopped short; and Lord Ormsby having waited some moments for him to proceed, but finding that he did not, said, "If anything unpleasant has occurred, Mr. Barrington, I hope that

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you will not hesitate to take me into your confidence. You know that I treated you with confidence when I wrote to you about Mr. Timperley; I also conceived the utmost friendship towards your grandson Gustavus——"

"Ah, I wish that he was here!" ejaculated the old man; and then in a paroxysm of anguish he added, "For it is hard to be all alone when one has got relations—and particularly too at a moment when one is standing as it were upon the very brink of riches!—great riches, Mr. Hargrave!—immense riches! For judgment is to be pronounced in a day or two—and—and—it is no longer next Term—but it is *this* Term!—*this* Term!" shrieked forth the old man, "that I shall regain my rights and crush my enemies!"

"Well—then, Mr. Barrington," said Lord Ormsby, "this is all the greater reason why you should not be alone at the moment when riches are about to be showered upon your head. It is also a reason why those who shared with you the bitterness of your adversity, should enjoy the sweets of your prosperity."

"What are you driving at, Mr. Hargrave?" demanded the old man, again fixing a very keen scrutinizing look upon his visitor.

"I thought that you yourself told me just now," replied Ormsby, "that you were all alone at this crisis of your life. You said that Gustavus was not here—and I see that Winifred is not."

"Come, confess the truth!" interrupted the old man: "you know or suspect something? You want to pump me—or you want to intercede with me—but you shall do neither! Drink your wine, and let us talk of other things."

"Really, Mr. Barrington," said Lord Ormsby, purposely assuming a cold look and tone, "if you persist in this evasiveness whenever I speak to you of your granddaughter Winifred, I myself shall begin to wonder how it is that the police do not knock at your door to inquire after her."

"What, sir!" yelled forth the old man, his face corrugating into myriads of wrinkles: "you dare—you dare insinuate——"

"I insinuate nothing," interrupted Ormsby; "but I say openly that if you persist in refusing an account of your granddaughter Winifred, I shall think it very strange."

"Now I know that you *are* acquainted with the matter!" exclaimed the old man, "and that you are taking this roundabout course in the hope of bringing me to the point! Well then, Mr. Hargrave, I tell you once for all it is useless for you to plead for Winifred. What! to marry the son of my bitterest enemy! Ah! there I have said it! I have let out the secret—if a secret it really was to you."

"From which I gather," interjected Lord Ormsby, "that your granddaughter has married Roderick Dalham. Well, I have heard something concerning that gentleman which ought to make you go down upon your knees and thank him, instead of harbouring this bitter venomous rancour against him!"

"Ah, the old story! the old story!" exclaimed Barrington petulantly. "Roderick Dalham's getting upon the jury—or else his supplying me with money through Winifred——"

"Both, both!—let us say *both*!" ejaculated

Ormsby. "You would have starved without him!—and your granddaughter would have been hanged without him! There! that is the plain truth! And now let me tell you, Mr. Barrington, that of all instances of ingratitude from one fellow-creature to another, your's towards Roderick Dalham is the blackest and most atrocious that ever came within my knowledge!"

"By heaven! such language as this!" exclaimed the old man, his face purple with rage; and grasping his crutch-stick, he seemed as if he were on the point of dealing a blow at his visitor.

"Ah! I mean to frighten you," said Ormsby, with the most imperturbable coolness, "in order that you may presently be all the more completely ashamed of yourself! Strike me if you dare! Why, I could tear that stick from your grasp and inflict a hearty belabouring on the shoulders of such a vile old man as you are! As for your age, so far from rendering you respectable it makes you all the more infamous! You have no heart and no soul! I despise and hate you! You are not worthy of the love of such a granddaughter as Winifred, nor the dutiful devotion of such a noble-hearted man as Roderick Dalham! E-treaties indeed!" continued Ormsby impetuously. "I would not condescend to lay intercessions at the feet of such a man! You are selfishness embodied. When you were in jail you would not have cared if you had lived upon the prostitution of your granddaughter!—you never would have asked whence came the money which she brought you! But because she remained pure and spotless—and because it was your enemy's son that furnished the means of supplying your wants—you pour out the vials of your odious anger upon that excellent girl as well as upon that generous-hearted man!"

Lord Ormsby had risen from his chair as he thus spoke: his tall form was drawn up to its full height: there was a majestic dignity as well as the most overpowering scorn in his whole demeanour. Barrington gradually sank back in his chair, aghast and dismayed at language to which he was so little accustomed and which was so little expected from the quarter whence it now suddenly swept over him like a hurricane. But Ormsby knew the world well. To appeal to the feelings of the selfish, or the justice of the prejudiced, or to the liberality of the bigoted, was as useless as to expect to find a heart that could melt in a block of granite or in a mass of iron. But to assail the individual with scorn and reproach—to overthrow him with oppression—to make him seem infamous in his own eyes—to tear off the mask from his countenance—and prove him to be a prey to the meanest, paltriest, and most odiously contemptible prejudices,—Ormsby knew that *this* is the way to beat down the defences with which a man surrounds himself for the purpose of fortifying an evil position.

"Mr. Hargrave! Mr. Hargrave!" said old Barrington, at length breaking silence, and speaking in a tremulous voice; "you—you—are taking very great liberties! You are presuming because—because you rendered me a service in unmasking that scoundrel Timperley—and then too, you have behaved kindly to my grandson: but—but it is not on that account that you must come here and abuse me in this style!"

"I scorn to abuse you," interrupted Ormsby, bending down from the height of his dignity a look upon the old man which was almost sufficient to crush him. "There is something vulgar and low in the idea of merely levelling abuse at a person! It is a thing which I never did, and could not do. But if by *abuse* you mean that I show you in your true colours—that I decounce you to your own conscience, as I will presently denounce you to the world,—if you mean that by holding up your name to execration——"

"No, no! you will not do it! for God's sake spare me!" groaned the wretched old man. "You do not know how shamefully I have been treated by the Dalhams!"

"By Sir John Dalham, you mean," interjected Ormsby. "Use not therefore the plural; for if you include his son, you speak falsely! With just as much reason might you accuse *me* of being your enemy."

"But one is apt to visit the sins of the father upon the son," said old Barrington, with a half petulant, half affrighted manner.

"If you quote scripture, sir," interrupted Ormsby sternly, "do not pervert it to suit your own vile prejudices and selfishnesses. Is there not a maxim which says, 'Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you.' Have you acted upon this principle? Have you behaved to Winifred with that goodness, that forbearance, and that gentleness which you always exacted from her? I do not interfere with your hostility against Sir John Dalham. It is natural: perhaps therefore it is rather to be commended than otherwise. I myself have had my hatreds and my loves; and Oh! would to God that the latter had predominated over the former!"

At this moment the door opened, and Mrs. Slater entered the room.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ORMSBY AND WINIFRED.

THE worthy woman was in tears; and she adopted a supplicating manner as she advanced towards the old man and his visitor. Ormsby had suddenly stopped short; but it was a look of the utmost kindness that he bent on Mrs. Slater; for he had heard from the lips of his daughter Agnes how admirably she had behaved to Winifred throughout all the period of her troubles.

"Pray excuse me, gentlemen," said Mrs. Slater, looking first at one and then at the other; "but I feared you were quarrelling—I mean to say disputing, or having high words: and I could not help stopping at the door, and I overheard a portion of what took place. Heaven knows I am not given to eavesdropping——"

"I am sure," interrupted Lord Ormsby, "that you are too good a woman to do anything for which you need blush. You have perhaps learnt sufficient to be aware——"

"That you are interceding for the best young woman that ever lived!" Mrs. Slater hastened to add. "God bless you for it! I have prayed Mr. Barrington over and over again to see his granddaughter and be reconciled to her. And here she is waiting below——"

"Eh, what?" ejaculated the old man: "Winifred down stairs? You have no business to allow it, Mrs. Slater! I have told you before that if you permit people to come to the house that I have no sympathy with——"

"Mrs. Slater," interrupted Lord Ormsby, "go and tell Mrs. Roderick Dalham that her grandfather finally discards her and utterly casts her off! Go and say that she has already humbled herself more than even any daughter could do to the author of her being—far more therefore than any granddaughter need do towards a grandsire! Say likewise that all her long battlings and strugglings against adversity for the sake of this grandchild have been thrown away, and that for all her illimitable goodness she is to experience naught but the most heartless ingratitude. Tell her therefore that she need come hither no more! So much for the dark side of the picture. And now for the bright side. Tell her that she has friends who esteem, admire, and love her; and that these shall all be summoned to-morrow, to meet for the purpose of devising the means to accomplish for her some permanent and substantial good. Mr. Wardour, and Mr. Cartwright—the amiable Miss Evelyn—yourself, Mrs. Slater—and I, who am now addressing you,—we will all assemble, and we will each subscribe to the best of our means, so as to render her altogether independent of this heartless old man who rejects, repudiates, and discards her! But stay! I will accompany you—and we will together tell Winifred all this."

While Mrs. Slater contemplated Lord Ormsby with mingled wonder and admiration, the old man sat writhing upon his chair, a prey to all the miserable feelings which could not fail to be experienced by one in his position, suffering under the lash of the terrible language which emanated from the lips of a man who seemed to have been sent thither as the avenger of the poor young woman. Ormsby marked the effect which his words had produced; and he lost no time in following up the blow.

"As for you, old man," he said, "we leave you alone in grim anticipation of such enjoyment as the speedy possession of riches will afford you. Keep them all to yourself! She whom you might have rendered happy therewith, and to whose pale countenance your kindness might have called up smiles, will not be with you! You have not long to live. When you lie stretched upon your death-bed, where will she be who might soothe your departing moments, smooth your agitated pillow, and help you to pray that God may have mercy upon your soul! Yes—and in your supreme hour you shall vainly call upon her! When the King of Terrors is striving towards you, ghastly in his spectral shape, you shall fruitlessly shriek out the name of her who will not come to solace and console you in the last painful instants when life is ebbing away! And now, Mrs. Slater," added Lord Ormsby, "let us descend and see Winifred."

"Stop, stop!" cried the old man, who was affrighted by the terrible words which had just been addressed to him, and which seemed to be fraught with all the awful impressiveness of prophecy: "do not leave me in this manner! You, Mr. Hargrave, are very, very severe——"

"Not more severe," interjected Ormsby, "than your conduct seemed to deserve! But if you now

do your duty, although tardily, yet you may rest assured that it will be in the kindest and most friendly tones I shall henceforth have the pleasure of addressing you. As for this good woman here, you cannot possibly bear any animosity against her."

"I am sure I have always done my duty to Mr. Barrington and his granddaughter," sobbed Mrs. Slater: "but even at the risk of giving offence to you, sir," she continued, speaking more firmly, as she thus addressed herself to the old man, "I would take dear Winifred's part."

"Yes, yee," grumbled Mr. Barrington, "every one will take part against me! No doubt of it! no doubt of it!"

"Come, my dear sir," said Lord Ormsby, who saw that the old man was now virtually conquered, "let us not have any more accusations or recriminations. Here is your granddaughter come to see you."

"Well, well," said the old man, "I will see her if you like. I—I—will forgive her as far as she is concerned; and then, Mr. Hargrave, you shall not be able to accuse me of being heartless and ungrateful. But the other—her husband—Roderick Dalham I mean—do not ask me to see him—or to forgive him—because—because it is impossible!"

"If you forgive Winifred, Mr. Barrington," responded Ormsby, now speaking with renewed sternness, "you must do everything you possibly can to recompense her for the period of anxiety which she has suffered under your displeasure. In a word, you must render her happiness complete."

"No no! I will never forgive him! I will never receive him!" shrieked forth the old man. "I know who you mean and what you mean!"

"Mrs. Slater," hastily whispered Lord Ormsby to the kind-hearted landlady, "be so good as to descend and tell Winifred that the reconciliation will presently be complete!"—but he spoke these words in so low a tone that they remained inaudible to Mr. Barrington.

Mrs. Slater left the room; and Ormsby, again turning to the old man, said, "Your own conscience tells you that you have acted unkindly towards your grand-child; and therefore your atonement must not be made by halves. At the same time that you give relief to her mind, you will be giving peace likewise to your own conscience. Receive her therefore at once—fold her in your arms—and bid her tell her noble-hearted husband that he may come to you to-morrow and receive your blessing likewise!"

"No, no!" exclaimed the old man with passionate vehemence. "I will not see Roderick Dalham! For your sake Mr. Hargrave, I will pardon Winifred!"

"For my sake, sir?" interrupted Ormsby, with sternness alike of tone and manner; "this is preposterous! Unless you act for the sake of reason and truth and justice, it will not be for that of one who is comparatively a stranger unto you! Once for all therefore, if you receive Winifred in the spirit of reconciliation, you must be prepared to welcome her husband likewise."

"Never! never!" cried the old man with shrill shrieking petulance. "Roderick Dalham shall never come near me—shall never receive a penny of my money! I have made my will—and all the riches which in a few days I shall possess, will go

to Gustavus—every chilling! every farthing! He will be my sole heir!"

"But this is monstrous!" exclaimed Ormsby, who had not been prepared for such an announcement.

"Oh, let Gustavus take all the riches, provided that you, dearest grandeire, will bless my husband and myself!"—and thus speaking, Winifred came rushing forward and threw herself at the old man's feet.

Mrs. Slater had misunderstood the instructions she had received from Lord Ormsby, and had fancied that he meant Winifred to come up as soon as possible. On reaching the door, poor Winifred's ears had been assailed by those violently uttered refusals on the part of her grandeire to receive or recognise her husband: she had remained rooted to the spot with an almost overwhelming anguish—she had clung to the door-post for support—she groaned inwardly in the deep bitterness of her spirit; and then exercising a sudden effort, she crossed the threshold, passed into the room, and threw herself at her grandeire's feet, as we have described.

And now the old man beheld the affectionate girl towards whom his conduct had been so harsh and unfeeling, but of whose tender love towards himself he never could have entertained the slightest doubt,—he beheld her kneeling before him—her hands clasped—her bonnet falling back from above the light hair which was gathered up in modest bands by the side of the pale cheeks—the eyes, blue as heaven, upturned appealingly towards him—the red lips apart—and the whole expression of her countenance indicating a degree of entreaty which sprang from the most unselfish love and which had nothing worldly-minded in it. Old Barrington was not naturally hard-hearted, but his prejudices were so strong that they rode paramount over those sensibilities which would otherwise have been lively and even tender. No—he was not naturally a stern man; indeed there were points of benevolence in his character; but his soul had been warped and his feelings blunted by long incarceration and by the sense of deep wrongs. Yet now that he beheld his granddaughter at his feet, his heart began to melt; and the impression which all Ormsby's proceedings had previously been making upon him, was strengthened by the appearance of the afflicted young woman.

"Well, well, I forgive you, Winnie," he faltered forth; "I forgive you, my dear girl. But—but—"

"I forgive her without reserve!" said Ormsby, with a stern significance.

Every threat which the nobleman had levelled at him—every reproach and denunciation to which Ormsby's lips had given vent—returned with overwhelming force to the memory of the old man and flinging his arms about Winifred's neck, he murmured, "Yes, my dear child—I forgive thee! Poor dear Winnie, I forgive thee!"

And now a most affecting scene took place; for the old man, in this moment of renewed tenderness towards his granddaughter, displayed all the weakness of a child: he whimpered and whined—he could not say enough to express his grief for his harsh conduct towards her.

"My poor dear Winnie," he said, "I have been

very, very cruel! I know it—I feel it now! Yes, yes—I know I have! I cannot fancy how I could have sent you away from me! Good God! I must have been mad: for now that you are again restored to me I feel as if I could not live without you! But you will come back to me, Winnie? You will come and live here again? and you will be good and kind to your poor old grandfather, notwithstanding all his harshness towards you?"

"Oh, do not blame and reproach yourself," she said, in a voice that was well-nigh choked with sobs. "You have not been harsh and unkind towards me! I no doubt deserved it all! But, Oh! these kind words you are now speaking——"

"Come, dearest Winnie, take off your bonnet and shawl—sit down—and let me see you settled here again. We will pass a happy evening. There is Mr. Hargrave—you know him very well——"

"How can I settle here, my dear grandfather," murmured Winifred, "while my husband remains unforgiven?"

"No, no—he is not unforgiven!" ejaculated Lord Ormsby; and again he flung a look of stern significance upon the old man. "Your grandfather is prepared to do everything he can to make you happy, Winifred."

"Oh, is it really so?" murmured the young woman, as she wound her arms about the old man's neck. "Tell me—tell me!—will you receive my husband? Oh, do say yes, dear grandfather! He respects you—he is a kind good husband to me——"

"How can I refuse you anything, dear Winnie?"—and now the old man again sobbed and wept like a child.

It was a cry of joy which burst forth from Winifred's lips; and again and again she strained the white head of that old man to her bosom. Then suddenly recollecting something, she glided towards Lord Ormsby; and taking his hand, she pressed it with fervour between both her own, saying in a voice full of heartfelt emotion, "A thousand, thousand thanks to you, Mr. Hargrave, for having been instrumental in bringing about this happy, happy reconciliation!"

"And heaven knows, my dear young friend," replied Ormsby, "that it is now one of the dearest wishes of my heart to see that you are completely happy. Mr. Barrington, permit me to shake you by the hand. You have just taken a step which I feel convinced you never can regret. May I hope therefore that you entertain no ill-will against me for whatsoever interference I have ventured to manifest in these delicate family affairs?"

"Say no more! say no more, Mr. Hargrave!" replied the old man, still whimpering and snivelling in a childish fashion. "It's all over now—and dear Winnie is come back—and—and—I will receive her husband—to-morrow. Yes—I will stretch out the hand—of—of—friendship—to Roderick Dalham."

"And you must do more than this too, my dear sir," interjected Lord Ormsby. "In restoring Winifred to her proper place in your heart, you must likewise restore her to the position which she ought to occupy as your heiress."

"Oh, no! no!—speak not of this, Mr. Hargrave!" cried Winifred. "I care nothing for the

riches which will shortly be in my grandfather's possession. I have his forgiveness—and that is sufficient for the present! When he departs hence, he will leave me his blessing—and that will be sufficient for the future. Let Gustavus inherit the wealth!"

"Excellent young woman that you are!" cried Lord Ormsby; "so magnanimous! so unselfish! But this may not be. Gustavus has married the niece of a rich planter, who will leave them all his wealth——"

"No matter!" ejaculated Winifred. "I wish nothing altered in respect to what my grandfather may have done."

"Permit me to enunciate my opinions on this point," said Lord Ormsby: "for I do not think, Mrs. Dalham, that you are altogether the most proper person to plead in the cause. I mean that there is such a thing as an excess of generosity, forbearance, and magnanimity; and this excess you are exhibiting. Remember, my young friend," he added in a hasty whisper, as he abruptly drew Winifred aside, "it is necessary for your husband's sake that you should become the heiress of those riches which are so soon to pass from the hands of his father into those of your grandfather!"

"Ah, true!" were the words which now murmuringly escaped from Winifred's lips, as she suddenly recollected something which for a long time past had been absent from her memory;—and this was the argument which Roderick Dalham had urged why she should bestow her hand upon him. "Heaven knows," she thoughtfully observed in a whispering tone, "I am not selfish! I covet not riches for myself! But since you tell me that Gustavus will be wealthy—whereas on the other hand my husband Roderick will utterly lose all his own inheritance——"

"Leave the matter to me, Winifred," interjected Lord Ormsby; then approaching the old man, he said, "You are prepared, Mr. Barrington, to do the full measure of justice towards Winifred—are you not? Gustavus will be very rich—richer perhaps than you yourself will presently become——"

"Tell me what you want done, Mr. Hargrave!" said the old man. "I am in your hands—I feel more comfortable since Winifred was restored to me——"

"I am glad to hear such language as this issue from your lips, Mr. Barrington," exclaimed Ormsby. "You are now in the right mood to do the fullest act of justice towards Winifred. In short, it would be the most signal proof of your affectionate regard for your admirable grandchild, if you were at once to make a will leaving her the heiress of all you at present have or may in time possess."

"Yes, yes—I will leave everything to her," said the old man,—"everything to her!" he emphatically repeated; for it was evidently a sort of compromise he was making with his feelings thus to ignore Roderick Dalham as much as possible.

"There, Winnie my dear! give me my writing-desk! That's a good child!"—and he smiled benevolently upon her. "There! there!" he added, smoothing down her hair—for she had now thrown off her bonnet and shawl so that she might seem to be completely at home with him; "it really looks as if you had never left me and everything

had been a horrible dream!—I mean our sunderance and severance. But I will make up for it, Winnie!—yes—yes, my dear child, I will make up for it! So now to business.”

Mr. Barrington arranged the writing-materials before him; and glancing up at Ormsby, he said, “Will you dictate the will, Mr. Hargrave?—for I am rather nervous—”

“You had better do it yourself, Mr. Barrington,” responded the nobleman. “It need not be long—merely a few lines. But I suppose you have got the will you drew up on behalf of Gustavus?”

“Yes, yes,” answered the old man; “and I draw it up myself too. I will destroy it first.”

“It is of no consequence,” said Ormsby. “All you have to do is clearly and succinctly to express your present intentions—to the effect that your granddaughter Winifred Dalhem, wife of Roderick Dalhem, Esq., is appointed your sole executrix, and that by this present will all previous ones are cancelled and revoked.”

“To be sure! to be sure!” said the old man; “that is the right form—and—and—I will soon accomplish the task. Of course you will witness the document, Mr. Hargrave?”

“Yes—I and Mrs. Slater,” responded the nobleman: then drawing Winifred aside, he said in a low voice, “It is needless, as indeed it would presently be impossible, to maintain any further mystery with you, because it is not the name of *Hargrave* which is anon to appear in attestation of that document!—it is another name!—one which perhaps you may have accidentally heard mentioned in connexion with the parentage of a young lady who is sincerely attached to you? But I will not keep you in suspense: I allude to Miss Evelyn—and I am her father, Lord Ormsby.”

It were impossible to describe the astonishment with which Winifred gazed upon the nobleman; and then an expression of radiant joy overspread her pale interesting countenance, as she said, “Oh, then, my dear friend Agnes is supremely happy now!—for doubtless, my lord, you have revealed yourself to your daughter?”

“Yes—Agnes is supremely happy,” answered the nobleman. “For the present it suits me to retain an incognito, and therefore the secret which is about to be revealed in this house will remain confined to yourselves. Of course I make an exception on behalf of your husband.”

“It is ready! it is ready!” were the words which issuing from the lips of old Mr. Barrington, at this moment broke in upon the discourse that was taking place betwixt his granddaughter and Ormsby.

“Go and fetch Mrs. Slater,” said the nobleman to Winifred, “while I glance over the document.”

The draft of the will was made with perfect accuracy, though the writing was in a nervous trembling hand. By the time Ormsby had perused the paper, Winifred returned to the room accompanied by the kind-hearted landlady, to whom she had taken the opportunity of hastily whispering the real rank and name of Lord Ormsby.

“Winnie—dear Winnie,” said the old man, “I—I—feel very faint—give me a glass of wine—”

“Good heavens, dear grandfather! you are in-

deed ill!” cried Winifred: and she rushed forward to sustain the old man as he sank back in his chair.

Lord Ormsby hastened to pour out the wine: Mrs. Slater lost not a moment in procuring other restoratives—water, vinegar, and volatile, and so forth; and in a few minutes Mr. Barrington appeared to be recovering.

“You feel better now, dear grandfather?” whispered Winifred, whose countenance brightened up after having for some minutes expressed the most painful anxiety.

“Yes, yes—I am better now,” he murmured, but it was in a feeble tone,—“a great deal better! Dear, dear Winnie! thank God you are with me! I—I—might die without you! Do not leave me, Winnie!—Oh, pray do not leave me!—no, not even for a minute!”

“I will not, dearest grandfather—I will not,” she replied in an earnest tone.

“Dear girl! But let me see? what were we about? Ah! I recollect! The will! the will! Yes, yes, dear Winnie—all my riches must be yours! I always meant it—and now it shall be done! Let me sign the paper.”

“For heaven’s sake, my lord,” whispered Winifred to the nobleman, “if you think there is the least danger arising from this state of excitement to which my poor grandfather is worked up—”

“No—he seems better now,” answered Ormsby, after having steadily surveyed the old man’s countenance for a few moments. “At all events this is a warning and an indication that no time ought to be lost!”

“Come, dear Winnie,” said the old man, “you must be by my side while I do this. There! prop me up like that! Ah! my right arm feels strong again, and my hand is firm as I grasp the pen; because—because I am going to do an act of justice. Yes—that is it! It is astonishing—ha! ha!” and he chuckled gaily, “how much stronger I feel at this moment! There! now for the ink! Let me see? This is the place for my signature—and the witnesses sign there. Dear, dear Winnie! how could I ever have thought of doing otherwise than that which I am now about to do?”

Mr. Barrington was on the very point of commencing his signature—the tip of the pen had touched the paper, when his head suddenly fell forward—a moan escaped his lips—and the blood from his mouth gushed over the document which lay *unsigned* before him. A cry of anguish burst from Winifred’s lips—Lord Ormsby sprang forward in alarm—and Mrs. Slater rushed to the bell to summon the servant in order that a surgeon might be immediately sent for.

In a condition of complete unconsciousness, and apparently in a dying etete, the old man was borne to his couch—by the side of which Winifred again took her place. Her heart was filled with the deepest woe—not because there was every reason now to apprehend the total alienation from herself and her husband of the vast property which was still the subject of litigation—but because she dreaded lest death had already numbered the hours of the grandsire whom she had so unselfishly and devotedly loved!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BARONET AND HIS SON.

WE must return to Mr. Timperley, whom we left at the moment when he took leave of Lord Ormsby and Agnes at Sidney Villa. The lawyer returned to the cab which had brought him thither; for he seldom used his own private carriage, which was therefore willingly abandoned to the monopolising use of Mrs. Timperley,—for he thought it looked much more professional, and seemed to convey the idea of greater hurry and bustle, to travel in street-cabs. Mr. Timperley now ordered the driver to take him to Sir John Dalham's villa—which, be it recollected, was at no considerable distance from the abode of Miss Evelyn.

On alighting at the Baronet's suburban residence, Mr. Timperley was immediately admitted by the footman who answered his summons at the front door.

"How is your master?" inquired the lawyer.

"Very bad, indeed, sir," was the reply—"as bad almost as bad can be."

"Indeed! this is a sad account which I hear," said Mr. Timperley. "Is your master confined to his bed?"

"Yes, sir;" and then the footman added with a significant look, "and I don't much think he will leave it again—at least not to get out of doors. But you are rather a stranger here, sir? I haven't seen you for some time past."

"Well, it is a few weeks since I was here," said Mr. Timperley.

"Never since old Barrington got out of prison," rejoined the footman. "Ah, sir! it was a cruel blow for my poor master that day! And when he heard—"

"When he heard what?" asked the lawyer, perceiving that the man stopped short. "Come now, tell me. I think I know what you mean:"—and he slipped some silver into the lacquey's hand.

"Well, sir," pursued the footman, "if you must hear the truth, of course I am bound to tell it. Sir John heard that old Barrington got out of prison because you had given up the very deed which kept him in!"

"And was Sir John very angry?" asked Mr. Timperley.

"He was furious, sir," was the reply: "I never saw anything like it! He raved and went on so—and declared that—but saving your presence, you know, sir——"

"Yes, yes!—don't stand upon any scruples?" interjected Timperley. "What was it that Sir John said?"

"Why, sir," pursued the footman, "he said that it was all your fault—that you had regularly—Now mind, I beg pardon, sir—but he said you had regularly sold him!"

"Ah! but there are two sides to that story," interjected Timperley. "I like to stand well with my clients on the one hand; but on the other I like to do my business honourably and in a straightforward manner. When I come to explain this business to your master, he will be perfectly satisfied. But Ah! by the bye, is Roderick at home?"

"No, sir—not at this moment," was the answer.

"He will be in presently for dinner."

"I believe he is very much away from home—is he not?" said Mr. Timperley.

"A great deal," replied the footman. "But yet no one can say that he neglects his father. On the contrary, he is always at Sir John's beck and call when the humour takes the old gentleman to have Mr. Roderick with him. And then too, although Mr. Roderick is a good deal out at times, I don't think he is unsteady: he never by any chance comes home the worse for wine—and there are no duns knocking at the door for him as there used to be. In short, Mr. Timperley, young master has grown so steady of late that no one would recognise in him the harum-scarum fellow of some few years back. But perhaps you will now walk up-stairs, sir?"

"Is no one with Sir John?" asked Timperley.

"No one at this moment, sir. The doctor was here just now—and master's valet has gone off to get a prescription made up. Sir John sends all the way to Bond Street for his medicines: he won't trust to any of the chemists in this neighbourhood."

The footman now led the way up-stairs, and knocked at the door of a chamber on the second floor. A feeble voice was heard desiring the man to enter; and looking in, the lacquey said, "If you please, Sir John, Mr. Timperley."

"Ah, Mr. Timperley?" cried the squeaking voice of the baronet—and its tones were similar in their querulous petulance to those of his litigating opponent Mr. Barrington. "Well, I suppose I must see him. Yes—let him come in."

Mr. Timperley entered accordingly: the footman withdrew, and closed the door. The chamber was elegantly furnished: the bed-curtains and window draperies were of figured blue satin, with deep golden fringes. A table was drawn near the couch; and on it were books and writing materials. The mantel ornaments were of a costly description; and on the toilet-table were countless bottles containing perfumes as well as cosmetics. In one of the opening chapters of our story we have described Sir John Dalham as a man past his seventieth year—shrivelled and withered, attenuated almost to a skeleton, with a repulsive countenance, a cadaverous complexion and small keen grey eyes. Strong passions had traced their deep lines, together with the wrinkles of age; and though the physical energies were well-nigh prostrated, yet the mind retained its strength marvellously, with all its antipathies and prejudices, its hatreds and its abhorrences even more potent than those which had exercised so strong an influence over the career of Sir John's opponent, Mr. Barrington.

As Timperley entered the room, Sir John Dalham raised himself up to a sitting posture in the bed; and assuming a stern expression of countenance, he said, "And pray, sir, what brings you hither? Is it to try to get some more of my business in your hands in order that you may betray me?"

"I have never betrayed you, Sir John," answered Mr. Timperley, looking the baronet full in the face with the utmost hardihood and self-assurance.

"Don't tell me that?" squealed forth the septuagenarian: "you know you let Barrington out of prison!"

"That is not true, Sir John," rejoined Tim-

perley. "I could not help myself. It would have been ruinous to my character as a lawyer to keep possession of the deed which long years beforehand Waldron had got Barrington to sign."

"To be sure!" ejaculated the Baronet, "the very deed on which it was relied to keep Barrington in gaol all his life—and by keeping him in gaol, to paralyse him and rob him of his energy to fight the great legal battle with me!"

"And for how many years, Sir John," said Timperley, "did I thus paralyse his energies? But it was a game that could not last for ever. If I had refused to give up that deed, the Cartwrights would have applied to the court—bills would have been filed against me—I should have been compelled to put in answers—and my long-standing complicity with you would have been dragged to light. Then there would have been exposure for yourself and for me—and all to no purpose; for I could not have held my position in respect to that deed, and Barrington would have gained his freedom all the same: thus you see, Sir John, it was better to give up the deed with a seeming good grace than to hold out and finally yield to force."

Mr. Timperley did not think it worth while to explain how, instead of having been swayed by all these convictions, it was in reality to the demand of his niece Cicely that he had bent and to her threatening language that he had yielded when surrendering up the deed.

"Well then," said Sir John Dalham, softening in his looks and tone as he slowly reclined back again upon his pillow, "your explanation, Mr. Timperley, places your conduct in a new point of view; and I think that perhaps you may have been right in what you did."

"You see, Sir John," continued the lawyer, "that the moment Mr. Barrington became possessed of a considerable sum of ready money to pay off the liabilities which kept him in a debtor's gaol, it was impossible for me to make head against him. Besides, he took his business out of my hands;—and in short, Sir John, it was to my interest to glide out of the affair with as good a grace as possible, for fear lest those Cartwrights should have probed the matter more deeply and scrutinized my professional conduct from the very first. But to sum up the whole of this question in a few words, it was impossible that all the professional skill which might openly or covertly have been enlisted in your cause—impossible likewise that all the money which you might have employed for such a purpose—could have kept Mr. Barrington another hour in prison!"

"Well, I daresay it is so," said the Baronet. "I am sure of it!—for you could not have had any motive in playing me false. But why have you stopped away? why did you not come near me after Barrington's release from gaol? It is this that had made me suspicious;"—and now the Baronet was thrown into the most violent fit of coughing, which lasted two or three minutes and left his eyes as if they were set in sockets of gore.

"I have been very busy," answered Timperley; "and that was one reason why I stopped away. Besides, I could not serve your purposes any further; and it was useless for me to call upon you.

There was another consideration:—I have always been afraid of meeting your son Mr. Roderick, because if he only acquired the certainty that I had for a long series of years played into your hands while I was ostensibly acting as Mr. Barrington's solicitor, he might expose me——"

"What! do you think my son has still any sympathies with those Barringtons?" ejaculated Sir John, again starting up to a sitting posture. "Ah! don't you recollect that I told you some time ago," he continued, without waiting for an answer,—"I daresay it must be upwards of a twelvemonth——"

"Yes, yes, Sir John," interjected Timperley: "I remember the day very well! You told me how you had sworn that if your son ever dared plead before you on behalf of those Barringtons——"

"I would cover him with my maledictions!" cried Sir John, with a fiendish expression of countenance, and with an emphasis which left no doubt as to his seriousness. "And now more than ever, if possible, am I embittered against the old villain Barrington; for he has refused all compromise—he is pushing things to extremes—he is doing his very utmost to beggar me!"

"And what do your attorneys now say of the business, Sir John?" asked Timperley.

"They don't speak with confidence," replied the Baronet: "I can tell by their manner that they are apprehensive as to the result. You of course know that judgment will be delivered in two or three days?"

"I know it. But why do you tell me that you surmise evil by the manner of your lawyers? Are they not frank of speech in a case where—where——" and Mr. Timperley hesitated for a moment,—"where, I may say——"

"Why, they are afraid of speaking," exclaimed the Baronet; "for the very same reason that you have just hesitated and stopped short! For if you had finished your sentence you would have spoken of mine as a case wherein all my fortunes are involved. Good heaven! if I were to lose the suit—if judgment were to be pronounced against me,—it would be the death of me! it would be the death of me at once!" added the Baronet.

There was a pause, during which Mr. Timperley fidgeted with his hat as he sat in a great easy chair by the side of the bed; for he would fain have asked more questions, but he did not like to put them.

"I tell you what, Timperley," resumed the Baronet; "I know what is passing in your mind. You are wondering whether I should be utterly and totally ruined if I were to lose this lawsuit? It is this idea that is killing me. I have had no one whom I could consult on the subject—no one to give me any friendly advice! Several times I thought of sending for you, Timperley; but I was held back because I fancied that you had used me unhandsonely or treacherously in reference to giving up the deed which enabled Barrington to effect his release. Then, as to my own lawyers, I did not choose to consult——"

"You did not?" interjected Timperley. "And might I, Sir John, ask wherefore you thus refrained from consulting your own attorneys?"

"Because—because," answered the Baronet, "it would have been showing them the nakedness



of the land. And now you see, Timperley, that I am treating you with all the friendship that was wont to exist between us. You understand me? Indeed I am very happy that you chanced to drop in at this moment!"

"And I am very glad also, Sir John," replied the lawyer, with a very low bow; "because I see that there is something wherein my advice can possibly be given, and which also involves the setting of your mind at rest."

"Well, I must trust you," said the Baronet. "Be so kind as to listen with attention, my dear Timperley. Judgment will be pronounced in a few days. If the decision be in my favour, well and good; there will be an end to the matter—I shall continue rich—success will add another ten years to my life—and at my death my estates will accompany the title to my son."

"So much for the bright side of the picture, Sir John," remarked Timperley. "I see that you

are now on the point of affording me a view of the dark side."

"Precisely so," resumed the Baronet. "Let us suppose that judgment is given against me,—all my estates are swept away, and the ready money which I may be enabled to dispose of will only just suffice to pay my lawyers' bills and other outstanding debts. In short, Mr. Timperley, if I do so dispose of that money I shall leave myself an absolute pauper. But that will not be pauperism only for me—but a heritage of pauperism for my son, who has been luxuriously brought up, and to whom I have not dared tell the tale of this desperate position in which I may possibly be placed!"

"It would indeed be a very awkward position, Sir John," interjected Mr. Timperley: and then he waited for further explanations.

"Yes—very awkward indeed," said the Baronet peevishly,— "very awkward! Come now, why

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don't you suggest something? You may be very well assured that I am not telling you all these things in a mere chit-chat style—but that I have a special motive. And what motive could I possibly have except that of seeking your advice and co-operation?"

"Pray might I ask, Sir John Dalham," inquired Mr. Timperley, "how much ready money would remain to you in the world if the forthcoming judgment of the Court of Chancery were to transfer all your estates to Mr. Barrington?"

The Baronet glanced around the room to assure himself that no one had entered during this colloquy: he then leant towards Timperley; and in a low mysterious voice he said, "I have got ten thousand pounds somewhere; and then you know there is this villa, which is my own freehold——"

"And what is it worth?" asked Timperley.

"With the dozen acres of land, the whole property is worth about ten thousand pounds. But if we throw in the furniture, the plate, and so forth—and all the property in my town-mansion, together with my horses and carriages, my wines, *et cetera*—I dare say that I might run up the figure to fifteen thousand."

"Very good," said Timperley, taking a sheet of paper and making certain memoranda upon it. "You have ten thousand pounds in ready money; and you could raise fifteen thousand more by the sale of this freehold and all your personal property. Is this so?"

"That is how the matter stands, my dear Timperley," rejoined the Baronet.

"In plain terms, Sir John, if judgment be given against you in the course of two or three days," said the lawyer, "you will be enabled to command twenty-five thousand pounds in one sense—but in another sense you will be utterly insolvent, because you have liabilities to that amount. Pray forgive me, Sir John, if I put the case rather offensively; but I am dealing with it as a lawyer—and in this point of view it is worse than madness to attempt to blind one's eyes to the veritable aspect of an affair."

"To be sure! to be sure, my dear Timperley! Now, what should you recommend?" asked the Baronet, again leaning forward and speaking in a confidential tone, as he looked earnestly into the lawyer's face. "Do you not think a little trip to the Continent would do me a great deal of good?"—and then he chuckled to a degree that brought on another fit of coughing, whereby it was a wonder that he was not carried straight off into the other world.

Mr. Timperley reflected for a few minutes; and then he said, "It would never do, Sir John! Your intention would get wind; for remember that you are not in a condition to take suddenly to your heels and decamp. You are an invalid—your removal might even prove fatal——"

"Ah! maledictions upon it!" muttered the old man, with a deep concentrated bitterness: "this is but too true!"

"Well then," continued Timperley, "if your creditors heard of it, they would adopt means to prevent your selling your property—they would lay an embargo upon it. In short, Sir John, this idea of flight would not serve your purpose. It must be abandoned."

"Then what can I do? what can I do?" asked

the Baronet. "I was thinking of a mortgage—a bond—or warrant of attorney—or whatever you call it—if I could find some trustworthy person——"

"Somebody, in short," interjected Timperley, "who would make a seizure of your property, Sir John, and then *privately* give it back to you? Well," added Timperley, after a few moments of reflection, "this scheme would succeed very well——"

"Do you know any trustworthy person," asked Sir John, "who would enter into the business? Of course I would reward him well. And then too, there is the sum of ten thousand pounds which must be secretly bought into the French Funds in my name——"

"It is a sort of business," observed Mr. Timperley, "which I could not very well recommend to a client: but it is something which for old friendship's sake I can do myself. Now the truth is, Sir John, I have had a great deal of your money in one way or another: I myself am rich enough to be enabled to afford to be grateful—and this assurance perhaps is ten thousand times better than any other kind of guarantee."

"Well, my dear Timperley," said the Baronet, again chuckling joyously, "if you will undertake this little business for me, it will prove an immense relief to my mind, as you may very well suppose——"

"No, father! no! you will never do this!" suddenly exclaimed a voice emanating from the other side of the bed; and Roderick Dalham, who had crossed the threshold unperceived by his parent and the lawyer, stepped hastily forward.

"What!" cried the Baronet, half ashamed and half angry: "you have been listening, Roderick?"

"It was not my intention to listen," quickly responded the son: "you ought to know, father, that I am incapable of doing anything so mean and paltry as that of playing the eavesdropper. I opened the door gently, thinking that you might be asleep—in which case I should have been sorry to disturb you. I could not help catching what was passing between yourself and this man at the moment—and then indeed I was riveted to the spot——"

"And what have you heard, Roderick? what have you heard?" demanded the old Baronet hastily. "But no matter!" he continued, with bitterness in his tone; "you have at all events heard enough to prove to you that if I lose the lawsuit I am a ruined man!"

"Ruined in purse, perhaps," ejaculated Roderick, "but not I hope ruined in honour! No, no, father! your debts must be paid!—yes, paid to the uttermost shilling!"

"What—and leave us beggars!" cried Sir John. "No, no! Quit the room, Roderick! I and Mr. Timperley will manage matters better: we have some discourse to engage us, whereas we need not witness——"

"Pardon me, my dear father," interrupted Roderick, "but I would much rather remain with you. Indeed, I cannot think of leaving you alone with this person!"

"Mr. Dalham," said Timperley, putting on an air of assurance, which indeed bordered upon defiance, "you have two or three times spoken of me rudely and superciliously——"

"I could wish, sir," said Roderick sternly, "that there was no necessity for me to speak of you at all. And now, if you do not wish to provoke me into a declaration of the opinion which I entertain of you, sir, you will at once take your departure."

"Hey? what?" ejaculated the Baronet: "giving orders in my presence and in my own room, Roderick! This is an impertinence which I do not choose to put up with. Mr. Timperley is a very excellent friend of mine——"

"A friend, father?" exclaimed Roderick, as he flung a scornful and indignant look at the attorney. "No, no!—it could not be a friend who would advise you to defraud your creditors and to tarnish your name with indelible disgrace at the close of your existence! Begone, sir—begone!" he added, turning fiercely towards the lawyer and pointing to the door.

"This is intolerable!" exclaimed the Baronet. "Roderick, you are not the master here! Mr. Timperley, you will remain—you need not mind his intemperate language——"

"I treat it with the contempt that it deserves," said Mr. Timperley; and he flung a bitter malignant look upon Roderick Dalham.

"Ah! you dare maintain a bold hardihood in my presence?" ejaculated Roderick; "and you dare look as if you thought that you could defy me? Depart, sir! Begone this very instant! It is my duty to protect my father from the insidious wiles of such a wretch as you. Yes!—doubtless it were a profitable game for you to get into your hands the management of these affairs! But you shall not!—no, by heaven, you shall not!—for even at the risk of offending my father now, I will protect and shield his honour against your vile machinations!"

All the while that Roderick Dalham was thus speaking, Mr. Timperley, who had risen up from the arm-chair, stood gazing upon him with an expression of countenance that was perfectly fiend-like in its malignity. It was the sardonic satisfaction and devilish inward chuckling of one who felt confident that he possessed the means of wreaking a bitter revenge, and who was calmly waiting for the moment when the blow should be struck.

"And so, Mr. Roderick Dalham," he said, "you talk of shielding and protecting your father's honour—do you? Very good! Nothing could be more proper! And I suppose that it was by way of bringing additional credit upon the name of Dalham that you have linked it with that of Barrington?"

Roderick started and turned deadly pale; while his father ejaculated, "What, what—the two names coupled? Timperley, it is you who are now giving vent to impertinences in your turn!"

"I am only afraid, Sir John," rejoined the lawyer, "that you will find I have proclaimed a very disagreeable truth. Ask Mr. Dalham whether Winifred is not his wife."

The Baronet flung a glance upon his son; and in that son's countenance he read the fatal corroboration of Mr. Timperley's words. Then the old man gave a wild cry and sank back upon the pillow.

"Father, dear father!" exclaimed Roderick, "forgive me, I beseech you!"

"Never, never!" cried the Baronet, suddenly raising himself from his sitting posture again. "Never! My bitterest curse——"

"No, no, father!" ejaculated Roderick, sinking upon his knees by the side of the bed; "curse me not! It is a terrible thing for a parent to shower maledictions upon the head of a son!"

"Yet such maledictions do I invoke——"

"No, no, father! Spare me, I beseech you! Oh, spare me, I implore! It is true that I have wedded Winifred: I love her—she is the best of women—and you would love her also, dear father, if you would but permit me to bring her hither that she may kneel at your feet and implore your blessing!"

"What! a Barrington enter my house?" almost shrieked the old man. "No, never! never! Roderick I disown—I disown you——"

"One word, father!" ejaculated the afflicted son. "For heaven's sake conquer your prejudices and look at the policy of the step which I have taken. If you lose the lawsuit—as loss it you must—the riches will only pass temporarily away from our family: they will revert to us—for I am sure that in the long run Mr. Barrington will forgive his granddaughter, as you, father, will now forgive your son!"

"Forgive you?" cried the Baronet: "never! never! Leave me at once! begone—depart—quit the house, I command you! I disown and disown you! You are no longer my son! Go!"—and the old man pointed with his skinny arm in a peremptory manner towards the door.

"Father, you cannot mean it!" said Roderick, rising from his suppliant posture; and he then caught a glimpse of Timperley's sinister visage peering round the curtains at him; for the lawyer had now taken his stand at the foot of the bed. "Ah! so long as you possess such an adviser as that," cried Roderick pointing towards Timperley, "I am afraid that you will be capable of any act of injustice!"

"Everything, Roderick, is at an end between you and me," said the Baronet, now speaking in a calm deliberate tone. "You have wilfully severed every tie which bound yourself to me or me to you. You have done it with your eyes open—and you must take the consequences. I now command you to leave my room this moment, and my house within an hour!"

A violent struggle was taking place in the breast of Roderick Dalham; and he was again on the point of throwing himself upon his knees and imploring mercy at his father's hands, when he once more caught sight of the sinister visage of Timperley—and he muttered to himself, "My evil genius is there to ruin me!"

"Depart!" said the Baronet, now bursting forth in an infuriate tone again: "depart! I disown you! If you tarry but another instant in my presence, I will curse you—I will invoke the most terrible maledictions upon your head!"

"No, no!" exclaimed Roderick affrighted at the threat; and he rushed out of the chamber.

The Baronet again fell back upon the pillows, gasping in the exhaustion which followed upon the tremendous excitement through which he had just passed. Timperley hastened to proffer a glass of water: but Sir John waved it petulantly away with his hand, and murmuringly bade the lawyer

give him a cordial which would be found in the cupboard. The request was complied with; and in a few minutes Sir John Dalham began to rally.

"Timperley," he said, "how long have you known this? when did you learn that Roderick had secretly married that girl?"

"I only learnt it this afternoon," replied Timperley. "It was by mere accident—I would however rather not mention any more particulars——"

"And why did you not tell me of it the instant you came into my presence?" demanded the Baronet.

"The truth is, Sir John," replied the attorney, "I came on purpose to communicate this intelligence: but in the first place you received me so coolly—then we got upon other subjects of such deep interest——"

"Well, well—no matter!" interjected the Baronet: "the terrible tidings have at length been communicated to me! How long has Roderick been united to that young woman?" demanded Sir John, after a pause.

"I am unable to answer the question," said Timperley. "The fact is, I called at a house just now, where accident led me to do that which your son Roderick himself did at that door——"

"I comprehend!" interjected Sir John. "You listened to what was going on?"

"Exactly so," replied Timperley; "and I overheard enough to convince me that Mr. Dalham was wedded to Winifred."

"And I have disowned him! I have discarded him!" said the Baronet, with a gloomy sternness. "I do not repent of what I have done—but I should blame myself if I had not done it. Good heavens! to think that the very thing which could most have embittered the concluding years of my life, should have been accomplished! But he is no longer my son! Ah, he may write to me—he may implore my forgiveness—but I will never relent! never! never! My title I cannot prevent from descending unto him; but in any case it shall be an empty one. Look you, Timperley! I will make my will forthwith—you shall draw it up now—at this moment! If I gain the lawsuit I shall still be a rich man and have wealth to dispose of. Heaven be thanked, there is no entail in the estates! I will leave everything away from Roderick. But if I lose the lawsuit—well, even in that case the little that there may be to dispose of shall pass away from him. Take your pen, Timperley—there! sit down and write."

"But to whom will you bequeath whatsoever you may have to leave, Sir John?" inquired the lawyer. "If I remember right, I think I have heard you say that you have no relations upon earth that you know of except your son."

"None," answered the Baronet. "But I will leave everything to a hospital—to a charity—to a public institution of some kind or another—In short, I will do anything with my property sooner than leave a single farthing to him whom I have disowned and discarded!"

"Well," said Mr. Timperley, "if that be really your intention, Sir John—and as I think I comprehend your wishes so thoroughly and completely—you had better perhaps—it is only a suggestion, mind!—but I was going to say that perhaps you had better leave me your executor."

"Anybody, except Roderick!" exclaimed the old man fiercely. "Proceed! draw up the will—let the business be concluded ere you leave this room!"

Mr. Timperley did not wait for any further bidding: he drew up the will, by virtue of which Sir John Dalham bequeathed one-third of whatsoever property he might leave behind him to certain charitable institutions which were named; and the residuum was devised unto his "faithful friend Thomas Timperley, solicitor of Lincoln's Inn Fields." The lawyer failed not to be struck with the idea that if ever this will were put in force, people would inevitably suspect that while he had been engaged as the legal adviser of Mr. Barrington he was treacherously playing into the hands of Sir John Dalham; but this consideration was not so strong as the temptation against which it had to be weighed. So Mr. Timperley muttered to himself, "I shall get over that suspicion, somehow or another;" and he went on with the draft of the will.

When the document was in readiness for signature, a couple of the domestics were summoned to witness it; and it was with a firm steady hand that Sir John Dalham affixed his name to the deed which disinherited his son. In the meanwhile Roderick had taken his departure from the house, —having packed up his personal effects, which he ordered a man-servant to carry to a certain cottage in Kentish Town. Need we add this was the residence of his wife Winifred?

Before concluding the present chapter, let us remind the reader that at the same moment when old Mr. Barrington had forgiven his granddaughter Winifred, and was endeavouring to make a will in her favour, Sir John Dalham had discarded his son and made a will utterly prejudicial to his interests. We should also remark that whereas the will which was of such importance to Winifred's interests, remained *unsigned*, and therefore of no more value than a piece of waste paper,—that *other* will which disinherited her husband Roderick, was duly signed and attested; so that while in the former instance the good intent failed to be carried out, in the latter instance the evil aim was fully accomplished!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE JUDGMENT AND ITS RESULTS.

ON the third day after the incidents which we have been recording, the memorable lawsuit of "*Barrington versus Dalham*" was to be brought to a conclusion. There were no longer any delays to be apprehended—no fresh arguments to be adduced—no new bills to be filed—no more affidavits to be put in. Judgment was actually on the point of being pronounced! It was not now to stand over for *next Term*; but it was veritably and positively *this present Term* that the business was to be ended! The great case which had lasted over thirty years—which had consumed vast sums of money, and had afforded opportunity for the exercise of so much fraud, intrigue, and chicanery on the part of more than one lawyer,—this memorable case of "*Barrington versus Dalham*," we say, was about to be concluded!

But where were the litigant parties on the occasion? Where were the two personages who for so many long years had been at such terrible warfare with each other? Sir John Dalham was chained by feebleness to his couch, at his villa near St. John's Wood; while Mr. Barrington lay stretched, in a state of serious illness, in his chamber at Mrs. Slater's house in Aldersgate Street. Thus neither of the individuals so deeply interested in the proceedings, was present in the court when judgment was pronounced. But Roderick Dalham was there; and amidst the crowd he discovered the sinister countenance of Mr. Timperley.

The judgment was delivered; and when the ceremony was concluded, Mr. Timperley, who had already made his way towards the door, rushed out of the tribunal, sprang into a cab, and ordered the driver to take him to Sir John Dalham's villa near St. John's Wood. Almost immediately afterwards Roderick Dalham made his own way through the crowded auditory; and likewise taking a cab, he ordered it to proceed to Mrs. Slater's house in Aldersgate Street.

Let us first follow Mr. Timperley. The lawyer arrived in due time at Sir John Dalham's villa; and the instant he alighted at the door, he sprang past the footman, rushed up the staircase, and sped to the Baronet's chamber. Sir John, hearing those hasty footsteps, knew that they were Timperley's; and hope became almost exultant within his breast; for he mentally ejaculated, "Timperley would never come so quick unless he had good news to impart!"

The door opened; and the lawyer made his appearance.

"What news, Timperley? what news?" exclaimed Sir John in a feverish tone of anxiety.

"Alas, my dear sir!" began Timperley; "it is as I feared——"

"Perdition!" howled the Baronet; and then a perfect volley of horrible imprecations followed. "Lost, lost!—and I am lost with it!" were the words with which he wound up.

"For heaven's sake compose yourself, Sir John!" said Timperley, who thought fit to adopt a soothing tone.

"Why the deuce did you come rushing so quick?" demanded the Baronet fiercely. "You inspired me with hope! You made me think that after all——"

"I came so quickly, Sir John," interjected the lawyer, "because you made me pledge myself, when I called last evening to see how you were getting on, that I would lose not a moment after the judgment was pronounced in relieving you of suspense. I kept my word—and I very much regret that there should have been evil intelligence——"

Here the lawyer stopped short; for Sir John Dalham again burst forth into a tirade of the most terrible imprecations. He raved like a maniac—the curses he heaped upon the head of old Barrington were terrible—he tossed on his pillow—he rolled himself about in the bed—the foam came from his lips.

"For heaven's sake, Sir John, be tranquil!" cried Timperley, "you will do yourself a mischief! Be reasonable! Your adversary has no very great advantage over you——"

"Ah! tell me," said the Baronet, who now appeared suddenly to recollect something,—"tell me, my dear friend, how fares it with him? Has his health improved? Tell me the truth!—say nothing false in the hope of consoling me!"

"I inquired last night in the neighbourhood of Mrs. Slater's house," answered Timperley; "and I can assure you, Sir John, that the account I received was to the effect that Mr. Barrington continued utterly unconscious of everything that was passing around him."

"Oh, if I could only fancy that he would never awaken from that unconsciousness to hear the tidings!"—and the expression of the Baronet's countenance was full of the most satanic malignity.

"He will never recover," interjected Timperley: "he will never awaken from this torpor in which he is plunged, and which is the precursor of the sleep of death!"

"Are you sure, Timperley? are you sure?" asked the Baronet. "You are not deceiving me? Swear that you are not!"

"Most solemnly I swear," answered the lawyer.

"Heaven be thanked!" was the impious ejaculation which now burst from Sir John's lips. "My mortal enemy will never know the value of the riches he has this day won! Ah! 'tis almost as good as a victory for me!—yes, almost as good! But what is this that comes over me? Dizziness of sight!—dizziness! Perdition!"—and the Baronet sank back upon the pillow.

Timperley rang the bell, and then proceeded to raise the old man up in the couch. He was gasping for breath—his eyes were glazing—the lids were drooping.

"He is dying!" mentally ejaculated the lawyer. "Your master is very, very ill," he said, thus addressing himself to the valet who at this moment entered the room. "Hasten to the doctor! But, Ah! it is too late!"—and as he thus spoke Timperley suffered the emaciated form which he had raised to a sitting posture, to sink gradually back upon the pillow.

The death-rattle was in the old man's throat: he gave a deep groan, and expired.

"It must have been the excitement of suspense followed by a powerful reaction," said Timperley to the valet after a brief silence.

"Then the lawsuit is lost, sir, I presume?" asked the domestic.

"Yes, Sir John was well-nigh beggared by the result," responded Mr. Timperley; "so that perhaps after all it is a happy release—a very happy release—and his friends ought not to deplore it."

"I suppose, sir," said the valet, "that Sir Roderick—as we must now call him—will come and take possession—because that will can scarcely be acted upon, begging your pardon, sir——"

"Sir Roderick will take possession of nothing," rejoined the lawyer, with a look of significant sternness. "I am the master here—and everything within these walls belongs to me."

The valet stared for a few moments in blank astonishment at Mr. Timperley; and then with a bow he said, "I beg pardon, sir—I was not aware that things were really at such an extreme."

"Come," said the lawyer, "and let us hasten

to communicate Sir John's death to the rest of the household."

"Yes, and to the son himself!" added the valet in an under-tone, which was however inaudible to the lawyer.

Meanwhile Roderick Dalham had arrived at Mrs. Slater's house in Aldersgate Street. Springing from the cab, he knocked at the front door, which was instantaneously opened by the worthy landlady herself; for she had seen the arrival from the window of her little parlour.

"Well, Mr. Dalham," she ejaculated; "what news? But Ah! I need not ask you!"

"The decision is on the right side," exclaimed Roderick, whose countenance was expressive of a magnanimous joy: "truth and justice have prevailed! But how is he?" and then an expression of the utmost suspense appeared upon his features.

"Better, better!—improving rapidly!" cried Mrs. Slater.

An ejaculation of joy burst from Roderick's lips; and he sprang up the staircase to the chamber where his wife, the devoted Winifred, sat by the bedside of her aged grandsire, who was sleeping.

"Tis won!" cried Dalham: and Winifred precipitated herself into his arms.

"Oh, my dear husband!" she murmured, "how generous is your heart that you can rejoice on his account"—and she glanced towards the old man—"at a result which impoverishes your own father!"

"You forget, my dear Winifred," he whispered, "that I am now discarded and disowned! But even if it were otherwise, it would be all the same; for it is a matter of rejoicing that right and justice have prevailed at last!"

"Hush! he sleeps!" said Winifred, again glancing towards the couch.

"Tell me—tell me, dearest," interjected Roderick, "think you that when he awakes again it will be to consciousness?"

"Oh, I hope so!—and I think so!" rejoined Winifred. "He recognised me just now—he murmured a few words—but I could not exactly catch their meaning—"

"He is awakening now!" said Roderick. "Oh, if he should regain the full power of his intellects, what happiness to communicate to him these joyous tidings!"

"Happiness indeed!" added Winifred, in a tone replete with a concentration of all the tenderest emotions.

The old man was now opening his eyes: his granddaughter bent over him—a smile appeared upon his countenance—and raising his hand, he caressed her face, murmuring feebly yet audibly, "Dear, dear Winnie!"

Mr. Timperley had not deceived Sir John Dalham when he told him how he had heard on the preceding night that old Barrington was in a state of unconsciousness beyond all hope: but at an early hour in the morning the old man had rallied somewhat; and during the last few hours his medical attendants had been enabled to speak more cheerfully concerning him. This much the reader may have gathered from the remarks made by Mrs. Slater and also by Winifred.

And now what a thrill of joy shot through

Winifred's heart as her grandsire, on opening his eyes, recognised her, patted her on the cheeks, and spoke endearingly unto her! She sobbed and wept in the fulness of her emotions; and the old man said, "Don't cry, Winnie—don't cry! I have been very ill—have I not? It seems to me as if my mind had been a blank—"

"Yes, you have been very ill, dear grandfather; but now, if you will not excite yourself—if you will only let me nurse you—and if you will lie perfectly quiet, you will soon get well. Ah, dear grandfather! don't you remember that the other evening you said you would receive Roderick? And he is here!"

"The other evening?" ejaculated the old man—for he was thus suddenly reminded that some time might have passed—though he knew not how long—during which his mind, as he expressed it, had remained a blank. A gleam of intelligence shot vividly across his wan countenance; and in a tone which derived its apparent strength from the powerful excitement which at the instant seized upon him, he said, "The lawsuit, Winnie? the judgment? It is to be pronounced *this* Term!"

"It is pronounced, my dear sir!" said Roderick, stepping forward and taking the old man's hand. "Yes, it is pronounced!—and you—But pray be calm! I beseech you, be calm!—while I proffer you my sincerest congratulations—"

"Enough, enough!" and Mr. Barrington sank back upon the pillow from which in his excitement he had partially raised himself; then he pressed Roderick Dalham's hand; and looking up in his countenance, he said with a sort of wonder, "Did I hear rightly? or did my ears deceive me? You—you—a Dalham—congratulating me, a Barrington!"

"Oh! pray, my dear sir," cried Roderick, "acknowledge me as one of your family now! for my own father has discarded me!"

"Discarded you?" ejaculated the old man.

"Why—what—"

"He has discarded me, sir," rejoined Roderick, "because I loved your granddaughter, and because I have espoused her!"

"Is this so?—is this so?" asked Barrington. "Your father has disowned you?"

"Yes—it is all too true!" murmured Winifred: "but you therefore, dear grandfather, must acknowledge him!"

"I will—I will!" responded the old man, in a voice that was quivering with emotions.

The door now opened gently; and Lord Ormsby looked into the chamber. He had been a regular visitor there since the memorable evening when the old man was smitten with a sudden illness; he had therefore made Roderick Dalham's acquaintance; and he knew how he had been disowned by his father.

"Ah!" said the nobleman, at once perceiving that Mr. Barrington had completely regained his consciousness, and comprehending likewise that Roderick Dalham had been acknowledged and welcomed by him; "affairs are altogether taking a most prosperous turn! Your restoration to health, Mr. Barrington, will bring smiles to many a lip; and I suppose that I may now congratulate you—"

"Yes," said Winifred; "he knows that the lawsuit is ended!"

"And I have recovered all my just rights!" ejaculated the old man. "Let me think over it for a few moments! It seems almost too good to be true! I am afraid that I shall awake and find it a dream!"

"No—it is not a dream," whispered Winifred's sweet voice: "it is a reality!"

Her grandfather covered his face with his hands, and gave way to his reflections.

"Well," he at length said, as he slowly withdrew his hands from his countenance, "I could not have thought that I should have taken it so coolly and tamely! I fancied that I should have gone almost wild with joy—that I should have danced and sung——"

"Remember," whispered Winnie, "that you have been very ill, dear grandfather—that you are weak and feeble! But now you will soon get well again——"

"Yes—I shall soon be well," he cried; and then there was a sudden bursting forth of sobs and tears—the pent-up feelings were at length forcing for themselves a vent. "Yes, yes—I shall soon be well," he whimpered, "and I will dance and sing—and we will be all so happy! But, Ah! don't forget that the people in that place—you know where I mean—must have a grand banquet. Let orders be given at once; and you must go yourself, Winnie, and see Mr. Robus—and tell him that he is to preside on my behalf. Oh, now I begin to feel my heart lighter!—yes, lighter and lighter every moment! Give me your hand, Mr. Hargrove—and you too, Roderick—and you kiss me, dear Winnie!"—and then he went on whimpering and crying like a child.

"My dear Mr. Barrington," said Ormsby, with whose real rank the old man was still unacquainted, "everything shall be done according to your desire in reference to the dinner in the prison. This is an hour of supreme happiness for you; and God grant that it may be prolonged into many equally joyous hours—aye, and into years also! But excuse me for reminding you——"

"Good heavens! I recollect!" ejaculated the old man, as a light now broke in upon his mind, making him aware how he had lost his consciousness at a very particular crisis. "I was about to make you my heirs, dear Winnie! Ah, well, it is not too late! Draw up the document, Mr. Hargrove! Make haste! make haste!"

"Do you not feel well, dear grandfather?" asked Winifred, gazing upon him with a look of sudden anxiety.

"Yes, to be sure! quite well—quite well!" he answered. "Happiness has made me well!—and it is because I am in such a hurry to ensure your happiness likewise, my dearest child, that I am impatient. Come, come, Mr. Hargrove——"

"I have set to work, my dear sir," said the nobleman, who was already seated at the table and busy in drawing up the will. "In two minutes——"

"But the darkness is setting in!" ejaculated Barrington. "You can't see to write!"

A groan burst from Winifred's lips as her grandfather thus spoke, and as at a glance she perceived how ghastly wan his face had just become, and how strange was its expression; for it was only about two o'clock in the afternoon—the day happened to be remarkably fine for the November

season of the year—and the darkness whereof the old man had spoken was evidently in his own vision.

"Do not excite him now," hastily whispered Winifred as she turned towards Lord Ormsby. "Roderick, go for the surgeon. I fear there will be a relapse! Oh, my God!" she murmured, "now, now, he is dying! I see that *this* is death!"

"Where are you, Winnie?" asked the old man. "Why have you shut the curtains? why don't you light the candles? It is growing darker and darker! And so we are rich again, Winnie? But have you ordered the banquet?—have you been to Robus? Ah, fool that I am! fool that I am! it is all a dream! Yes, yes—I know why it is getting darker and darker! It is because I am still locked in that dreadful place——"

"No, dearest grandfather," whispered Winifred, with difficulty composing her voice for the purpose amidst the intense anguish which wrung her heart; "you are not in that dreadful place! You are in the enjoyment of freedom!"

"No, no—it is your kindness that makes you tell me so, dear Winnie!" said the old man. "I understand it all now. Judgment stands over until next Term! Oh, my God! to drag on existence here till next Term! Hold your jaws, Robus! Tell him not to taunt me, Winnie! Ah, now 'tis pitch dark! Darkness in a prison!"

His voice was lost in the gurgling, rattling sounds which were coming up from his throat; and these were mingled with the low, deep, agonising sobs of poor Winifred, as she bent over her dying grandfather, with her arms thrown round his neck. Soon all was over—and the successful plaintiff in the great lawsuit which was that day decided, ceased to exist!

Winifred was borne in a half-fainting condition from the chamber which death had just visited; and she received the kindest ministrations from her husband. Lord Ormsby left them together, that he might go and visit his daughter Agnes and communicate to her how the lawsuit had been decided—how old Mr. Barrington had awakened to consciousness—and how the excitement of joy at gaining the long-disputed fight in the arena of the Chancery Court had proved fatal to him!

A couple of hours elapsed after the old man had breathed his last; and Winifred was now more tranquil in her mind: she was strengthened by a feeling of holy resignation.

"Gustavus is now the heir to all this great wealth," she said to her husband. "Must we not find out where he is, dear Roderick, and communicate with him as speedily as possible?"

"Yes, Winifred," replied Dalham; "this is a sacred duty, and it shall be performed with the least possible delay. You know who are the London agents of Mr. Pincock of Jamaica?"

"Yes—Messrs. Millard and Co., West India merchants, Lime Street, City."

"It is probable that they may know where Gustavus and his wife are," continued Roderick; "for the young couple doubtless apply to those agents for money as they require it."

At this moment there was a tap at the door of the room where Roderick and his wife were seated together; and Mrs. Slater made her appearance.

"I beg your pardon for intruding," she said:

"but there is a servant from St. John's Wood—he is inquiring most anxiously for you, Mr. Dalham—he has been to the cottage in Kentish Town—he there learnt that you would be most likely found here—the man's looks are very much troubled—I really think, sir, that he has something to communicate in reference to your father——"

"I will go to him," said Dalham: and he hastened down stairs.

Mrs. Slater remained in the drawing-room to console with Winifred; and after a few observations, she said, "It is to be hoped, my young friend, that your cousin Gustavus will behave liberally to you in reference to the fortune."

"I am sure Gustavus, with all his faults," answered Winifred, "possesses a good heart; but I am confident that my husband would never accept as a gift or as a charity——"

"It would be no charity, Winifred," interrupted Mrs. Slater: "for even if Gustavus were to abandon on your behalf the whole of the fortune which he has just inherited, it would only be doing as he ought, inasmuch as the dying intentions of your poor grandfather are now well known——"

"My husband has his pride, Mrs. Slater," interrupted Winifred. "And then too, he knows that there was a time when I thought that Gustavus looked upon me as his intended bride; and Roderick would not accept a favour from a person who had once been as it were a rival. Oh! you know, my dear friend, that I covet not riches for my own sake; while on the other hand I am equally indifferent to poverty, because I can work for my bread. But Oh! when I think of my husband—and my unborn babe,—when I reflect that Roderick is discarded and disowned——But Ah! did you not say that it was a message from his father that the servant brought? My brain is confused——"

"No, no—I did not say so," interjected Mrs. Slater. "I only said I thought it might be so, for the man's looks were troubled."

At this moment Roderick Dalham hastily reappeared; and approaching his wife, he said, "My dear Winifred, the coincidence is most extraordinary! most deplorable!"

Her husband's distressed looks at once struck her with the force of a presentiment; and in a voice full of anxiety, she said, "Oh! do you mean, dear Roderick, that your father has died without leaving you his blessing?"

"Alas, it is so, dear Winifred!" he responded. "My father is no more! I am Sir Roderick Dalham—and you are Lady Dalham. Empty titles, Winifred!—empty titles only!—for not merely did my parent discard me"—here Roderick sobbed for a moment—"but he disowned me to the very uttermost extent of his power; and whatsoever he had to leave, he bequeathed to that villain Timperley!"

"Oh, my poor husband!" cried Winifred, throwing her arms about Roderick's neck; "it cuts me to the very quick to think that through me you should have been discarded and disowned!"

"Blame not yourself, Winifred," interrupted Sir Roderick—and he embraced her affectionately. "I do not forget," he added, in a low whisper, "how it was I who forced you, as it were, to accompany me to the altar—how I prayed and en-

treated that you would become my wife! You therefore need not blame yourself for whatsoever consequences have ensued. No, Winifred!" added Sir Roderick, emphatically; "nor do I for a single moment regret the hour which made you mine!"

There was a brief pause, during which tender caresses were exchanged between the husband and wife; and Mrs. Slater wiped the tears from her eyes, for she was deeply moved by the scene that was passing before her.

"Is it not strange," resumed Sir Roderick Dalham, "that the decision of the lawsuit should have led to two deaths, occurring within the same hour, and almost at the same instant! Plaintiff and Defendant—there they were, each stretched upon the bed of death! Excess of joy and excess of grief struck two blows which gave two victims over to the hands of death! The one lives not to enjoy the riches which suddenly showered upon him: the other has gone out of the world at the moment when the vortex of ruin opened at his feet! These are solemn teachings, Winifred! Not that you, my dear wife, require such moral influences for the improvement of your own mind; because under all changing circumstances and every phase of life I have found your conduct the same—admirable—most admirable!"

There was another pause; and this was suddenly broken by Sir Roderick Dalham, who exclaimed with passionate vehemence, "By heaven! my father's creditors shall not be defrauded by that villain Timperley!"

"How know you," asked Winifred—or Lady Dalham, as we may now call her—"that such is his intention?"

"The friendly valet who has come to inform me of my father's death," replied Sir Frederick, "was told by Mr. Timperley that everything at the villa now belonged to him—that he was the master there—and that he therewith took possession of all that the house contained. For this reason I argue the very worst. But the iniquity shall not be accomplished!"

"What will you do, dear Roderick?" asked Winifred, suddenly becoming affrighted by the look and manner of her husband.

"Fear nothing from any rashness on my part!" he responded. "I will not be intemperate—I will do nothing that can jeopardise my safety! Fear not therefore, I repeat! I will soon return, dear Winifred!"

Sir Roderick then quitted the house; and stopping a cab, he took his seat in it, ordering the driver to take him to the villa in the neighbourhood of St. John's Wood. On reaching his destination, he inquired of the footman who opened the front door, whether Mr. Timperley was still there? The reply was in the affirmative; and the lacquy said in a tone the sincerity of which was unmistakable, "I hope to God, Sir Roderick, that you will not be altogether deprived of your just rights!"

"I claim no rights for myself," was the new Baronet's answer; "but I am determined that those who may have any claims upon my late father's property shall not be defrauded."

"Defrauded?" echoed Mr. Timperley, who at this moment came forth from the dining-room. "Defrauded? Pray, Sir Roderick, did you mean to apply the word in a manner disrespectful, and



even insulting to my character as a professional man?"

"It were well, sir," answered Delham, with a stern look, "if you and I were to have some little private discourse together."

"Oh! by all means!" said Timperley, who naturally wished to avoid a scene in the hall. "I am ready to give you every explanation in reference to your deceased father's property."

"I believe a will was made," said Sir Roderick, when he and the lawyer were alone together in the dining-room; "and two of my late father's servants witnessed it by his command?"

"Yes, sir—there is a will," responded Timperley, surveying the new Baronet with the hardihood of one who felt strong in the position he had taken. "There is a will—and it shall be duly forthcoming."

"And according to that will," pursued Sir Roderick, "you, Mr. Timperley——"

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"Oh! I have not the slightest objection to tell you the nature of the will," interrupted the lawyer. "One-third of your deceased father's property is to be apportioned to charitable purposes: the other two-thirds are bequeathed to me as the faithful friend of the late Sir John Delham."

"I need not tell you, Mr. Timperley, as a lawyer," said Sir Roderick, "that if you administer to my late father's will, you are bound to settle the liabilities and debts before paying a single legacy or taking the slightest heed of any bequest."

"You need not trouble yourself upon that score," said Mr. Timperley, with a cordonic smile. "Your father's debts are paid."

"Paid?" ejaculated Sir Roderick: "paid?" he repeated. "It is preposterous! I overheard sufficient between yourself and him the other day—on that fatal day when you mercilessly betrayed the secret of my marriage—a secret which I know not how you discovered——"

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"Let us not wander away from the topic on which we were discoursing," interrupted Timperley. "I tell you that your father has left no debts behind him. They were all settled."

"Settled? Who settled them?" asked Sir Roderick, completely bewildered.

"Who settled them?" repeated Timperley, in a half-mocking tone. "Why, who could settle them except me? You look incredulous. But I may as well satisfy you, Sir Roderick," continued Timperley; "and it will doubtless save you a great deal of trouble in running about to make inquiries of the creditors and ascertain what really has been done——"

"I await the explanation," said Sir Roderick, but with a look and tone which was as much as to imply that he was prepared to resent any subterfuge, mockery, or trickery that might be practised towards him.

"Since you overheard so much of what took place between your father and myself the other afternoon," said Mr. Timperley, "you perhaps learnt that amongst other liabilities he owed an immense sum to his lawyers. Well, of course his lawyers knew that the Chancery suit was safe to be decided against him, and that he positively had not the ghost of a chance. I went to them—whispered in their ear that Sir John would be utterly insolvent if judgment were given against him: they were alarmed for their own coats—I offered to make a certain bargain with them—in a word, I bought their debt—I gave them——But no matter what I gave——"

"It matters greatly," interrupted Sir Roderick Dalham. "But of this we will speak presently. I presume, Mr. Timperley, that you dealt in the same way with regard to the other creditors of my father?"

"Precisely so," responded the lawyer coolly. "When I proved to them that his own attorneys thought so badly of his case that they took a moderate per centage as a settlement in full——"

"Of course they were all willing, and indeed anxious to do the same?" ejaculated Dalham. "But remember, sir, that if you represented my father as being altogether insolvent, you practised a foul fraud; for he himself explained to you that his assets would cover all his debts by paying twenty shillings in the pound."

"Well, well, Sir Roderick, we will not discuss the subject any further," said Mr. Timperley. "I have given you as much explanation as you can possibly require, and more than you had any right to demand. It was a legitimate speculation on my part, with your deceased father's creditors——"

"It was a fraud and a villany on your part!" ejaculated Dalham passionately. "Those creditors should have been paid in full ere you touched a single shilling of the spoil yourself!"

"That may be your opinion, sir," interjected Timperley; "but it is not mine. And now permit me to observe that you are not beneath your own roof."

"I presume," said Roderick sternly, "that before I am ejected hence, I may be permitted to go and fling one last look upon the remains of my father?"

Mr. Timperley bowed; and Sir Roderick left the room. He ascended to the chamber of death;

and there he remained for some minutes. On issuing forth, he met three or four of the servants who purposely flung themselves in his way that they might condole with him on the unfortunate position in which he was placed; for the fact of the disinheritor was no secret in the house.

"I thank you for your kind sympathy," he said, with much emotion; "and believe me that I could cheerfully welcome poverty if I knew that my late father's liabilities had been honourably liquidated. But the matter shall not rest here," he continued, as he saw that the dining-room door had been put ajar, evidently to enable Mr. Timperley to overhear whatsoever was taking place. "There shall be a thorough and complete investigation!"

"One word more with you, if you please, Sir Roderick!" exclaimed the lawyer, now issuing forth from the dining-room. "There is something I had forgotten to say."

"I will hear it," answered Dalham; and he re-entered the apartment, where he was now once more alone with Timperley.

"Look you, Sir Roderick," said the man of business, assuming a pleasant and conciliatory air,—"you see very well that I am not afraid of you and that I care nothing for your threats. But I do not wish to be hard upon you. You angered your father—and he of course had a right to dispose of his property as he thought fit: therefore you must not blame me, nor yet the hospitals or charitable institutions——"

"I do not wish to argue the point, Mr. Timperley," interrupted Dalham. "Perhaps it is only too easy to understand how you, who were for so many years the attorney of the deceased Mr. Barrington, could have merited such signal proofs of friendship on the part of Sir John Dalham. Yes!—the iniquitous part which for long years you must have played, is now beyond a doubt! To your vile machinations was poor Mr. Barrington the victim! It was you who kept him in prison!—you who by your conduct undermined his health!—you who have made him endure so much, that, by heaven! when I think of it all, I can hardly keep my hands off you!"

"If you address me in this style, Sir Roderick," said Mr. Timperley, who first became very pale, and then assumed a supercilious look of contempt, "I shall recall the benevolent intention which was about to prompt me to offer you a cheque for a thousand guineas, just to see your way in the world."

"Villain! would you bribe me?" exclaimed Dalham, with a fierce indignation. "By heaven! you are a man who pollutes the very atmosphere itself and renders it sickly and fetid to breathe in your presence!"

"Ah! this insult!" ejaculated Timperley in accents of rage. "By heaven! I will find some means of punishing you!"

"Wretch! I defy you! Talk of punishment indeed! Oh! it is upon your head that retribution ought to fall!"

Thus speaking, Roderick Dalham rushed out of the house; and throwing himself into the cab which had brought him thither, he ordered the driver to retrace his way to Aldersgate Street.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE FUNERAL.

SIR RODERICK DALHAM returned to Mrs. Slater's house in Aldersgate Street; and he found Winifred resigned and tranquil, as he had left her. He communicated all that had occurred between himself and Timperley; and he said, "I am determined to take legal advice in reference to that man's proceedings."

"I do not exactly understand," said Lady Dalham, "what it is that he has done, nor how he purposes to realise a sum of money for himself."

"I will explain it, Winifred, by means of an illustration. Suppose that my father owed his lawyers ten thousand pounds, and Mr. Timperley went and bought the debt for two thousand——"

"Ah, I begin to comprehend!" ejaculated Winifred.

"My father owed about twenty-five thousand pounds altogether," resumed Sir Roderick; "and the wrecks of his property will produce precisely that amount. Now, suppose that Mr. Timperley has given five thousand to buy up the debts, the estate is thereby rendered perfectly clear. Well then, out of the twenty-five thousand there are about eight thousand to go to the hospitals and public institutions, and about sixteen thousand remain to Mr. Timperley. Deduct from this the five thousand he has paid in buying up the debts, and he is a clear gainer to the extent of eleven thousand! Such a sum, Winifred, constitutes a good day's work for a legal man," added Sir Roderick bitterly; "and it requires only one such piece of business every year to give him a large income."

At this moment Mrs. Slater entered the room, to say that the person who had called a few hours back to fetch Sir Roderick Dalham, had returned and besought an immediate interview with him.

"It is the faithful valet James Nash!" ejaculated Sir Roderick. "What fresh tidings can he have for me? Has Timperley become affrighted? and has he sent to propose terms? If so, I will not agree to them—unless they go to the extent of paying my deceased father's creditors to the very uttermost shilling that the property he has left behind will allow! But at all events I will see what Nash wants with me."

Sir Roderick descended to the hall where the valet was waiting; and he motioned the man to follow him into Mrs. Slater's little parlour.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Roderick," said Nash, "but I could not rest until I came to speak to you. I don't at all like the way in which things are being conducted by that fellow Timperley. I have been thinking a great deal over the matter; and one reflection and another has brought something into my mind——"

"What is it, James?" asked Dalham. "You are faithful and devoted to my interests—and rest assured that you shall not go unrewarded."

"I care not for a reward, Sir Roderick; I am not thinking of it," rejoined the valet. "But I have taken a hatred to that fellow Timperley; and there is something which has crept into my recollection that I never thought particularly of before, but which now seems to have a greater signifi-

cancy. At all events you know, Sir Roderick, that if you begin to suspect a man in one thing, it makes you attach importance to other matters that might previously have only been looked upon as mere trifles."

"True, true, Nash!" said the Baronet. "But Mr. Timperley is a base designing man—unprincipled and unscrupulous! There cannot be the slightest doubt of it! I believe him capable of almost any wickedness! However, tell me what this is that has now struck you—or, as you yourself express it, has crept into your recollection?"

The valet made a certain communication, which we need not now describe, inasmuch as it will more properly belong to a future portion of our narrative. But Sir Roderick Dalham listened to it with the utmost attention; and when James Nash had concluded, the Baronet reflected deeply for several minutes. At length he shook his head slowly, saying, "It is curious! it is singular! But it is also too serious a subject for us to found any positive supposition or belief thereon. It may only have been a trifling coincidence, such as you yourself regarded it at the time, though now you are led to invest it with a greater significance from the fact of your having obtained a deeper insight into the villany of Mr. Timperley's character. At all events do not mention the matter elsewhere. There is a friend whom I can consult and who will proffer me the best advice. I shall not fail to see him to-morrow."

The faithful valet then took his leave; and Sir Roderick Dalham, on rejoining Winifred, devised some pretext to account for the man's visit—for he thought it more prudent not to acquaint her, at least for the present, with the nature of the topic which had been started during the interview.

On the following day Lord Ormsby—for to this nobleman must our attention now revert—proceeded at about the hour of noon to Sidney Villa. He found Agnes and Corinna together in the boudoir, which also served as the former young lady's studio; and Ormsby, having affectionately greeted his daughter and his young cousin, exclaimed, "Ah! now, my dear Agnes, I shall be enabled to pay greater attention to your beautiful drawings than I did the other day; for I have at present a leisure hour or two. Everything that regards you, my dear child, possesses the greatest interest for me. You are a proficient in water-colour drawing. But Ah! that easel? I knew not that you practised in oil-colours?"

"Our dear Corinna is accomplished in this latter respect," said Agnes; "and she has been giving me a few lessons."

"Oh, my lord!" cried the Italian girl, "I am afraid that I am only an indifferent preceptress; for my mind has been too much agitated of late by uncertainties in reference to what my dear father may be doing——"

"And what Edgar Marcellin also?" interjected Ormsby with a good-natured smile. "But what is the subject of this oil-painting which you are practising, Agnes, under the auspices of your cousin?" he asked, turning towards his daughter.

A melancholy shade came over the beautiful face of our heroine, as she said, "I was attempting, my dear father, to copy the portrait of my poor mother."

"A worthy and a suitable study, Agnes," said

the nobleman; "for your mother was endowed with a remarkably handsome countenance. You, my child, possess a beauty which somewhat resembles her's; but your's is softened and chastened—your's is a modest angelic loveliness—"

But here he stopped short; for he found that he was speaking audibly in a musing strain—whereas his observations were really not intended for the ears of his daughter nor her cousin, but were rather meant as a sort of silent and mental apostrophe. He took from the easel the panel on which the outline of the long-dead Honoria's features were already sketched; and as Agnes stood in front of him, he contemplated first the lineaments of the deceased mother, and then raised his eyes to survey the features of the daughter. Corinna, standing by the side of the chair on which the nobleman was seated, viewed the scene with that deep pathetic interest which was inseparable from it; and at length Lord Ormsby said, "Let me again see the original, Agnes! I studied it well the other day; but I would fain behold it once more!"

The portrait of Honoria was brought. It was painted at the marriage of the nobleman with Waldron's daughter, nearly twenty years back: it was an admirable work of art, and faithfully delineated the countenance of her who, if she were now alive, would be Lady Ormsby. A thousand recollections, alike tender and painful, came trooping in unto the mind of the nobleman; and a tear trickled down his cheeks. The beautiful Agnes, who was weeping also, glided towards him, and wound her arms about his neck. Their tears mingled; and Corinna, raising her kerchief to her face, wept likewise.

"Come," said Ormsby, suddenly, "let us look over the water-colour drawings;"—and the portfolio was accordingly produced. "This is a beautiful landscape," he said: "the lights and shades are admirably contrasted. But, Ah! in this next one you are particularly happy, dear Agnes!"

"You see, my lord," said Corinna, "that Agnes develops in that picture a perfect knowledge of what we Italians call the *chiar oscuro*."

"True!" ejaculated Ormsby. "But, Ah! this portrait? It is that of a woman who would be strikingly handsome were it not that the mouth is somewhat too large and prominent. It is no fancy-portrait—"

"No," said Agnes: "it is the likeness—or at least is intended to be that of a lady who has proved a very kind friend. I mean Mr. Timperley's niece."

"Ah! this is Mr. Timperley's niece?" cried Lord Ormsby: "Cicely Neale—or rather, I should say, the Hon. Mrs. Hector Hardress?"

"The same," rejoined Agnes.

"By the bye, let us speak of her," said the nobleman. "How came she to marry the son of a peer? Was he attracted by her beauty?"

"It happened very suddenly," replied Agnes.

"She eloped with Mr. Hardress; and they were first of all married in Scotland—at least I believe so—"

"Or perhaps they proclaimed themselves man and wife in that country," said Lord Ormsby; "which according to the local law constitutes a valid marriage."

"I know not exactly how it was," rejoined

Agnes; "but it is very certain that the nuptial ceremony was subsequently performed according to the rites of the English Church. Her uncle behaved very kindly to her: he gave her a dower of thirty thousand pounds."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Ormsby. "But that was an amazing instance of liberality on the part of such a man as Mr. Timperley, who I believe is very fond of money."

"Oh! but Cicely wields immense influence over him," ejaculated Agnes. "It was through her, you know, my dear father, that I obtained the deed which enabled poor Mr. Barrington to emancipate himself from captivity."

"Ah! that deed which experienced so many adventures," interjected Ormsby, "before it reached its destination. Well, this niece of Mr. Timperley must indeed possess an immense influence over her uncle that she could induce him to give her a dower of thirty thousand pounds in the first instance, and in the second to surrender up a document which must have been so essentially useful to him in the tortuous, double-dealing, fast-and-loose game which we now know he was playing between poor old Mr. Barrington and the late Sir John Dalham."

"Oh, Cicely has said to me," remarked Agnes, "her uncle would refuse her nothing."

"So it would appear," said Ormsby, musing; and then he added in a lower tone, "This is at least singular! She must have some peculiar hold upon her uncle: he is not the man to make such great concessions to his niece through mere motives of affection."

The discourse was now interrupted by the entrance of Rachel, who came to announce that Sir Roderick Dalham had called, and that he requested an interview of a few minutes with Lord Ormsby.

"It is doubtless on some private matter that he wishes to consult me," said the nobleman.

Thus speaking, he quitted the boudoir and passed into the drawing-room, to which the Baronet had been shown. After the exchange of a few complimentary expressions and kind inquiries, such as existing circumstances suggested, Sir Roderick said, "You have of course heard, my lord, that my father is no more?"

"Yes—I heard of his death last evening," replied the nobleman. "It appears that grief for the loss of the suit killed your father, as joy for its gain proved fatal to your wife's grandfather."

Sir Roderick answered in the affirmative; and he then proceeded to narrate to Lord Ormsby everything which had taken place between himself and Mr. Timperley at the villa.

"By heaven!" ejaculated the nobleman, "this is intolerable! For twenty long years have I known that Timperley is an accomplished villain! But methinks that you have more to communicate?"

"I have, my lord;" and Sir Roderick proceeded to explain how the faithful valet James had visited him in the evening for the purpose of making a particular communication.

Ormsby listened with the deepest attention: then followed a most serious deliberation betwixt himself and Sir Roderick, but the nature of which it is not now requisite to lay before the reader.

"I scarcely know how to advise you, my friend," said Lord Ormsby; "but I trust you will agree

with me that it is highly expedient nothing should be done rashly."

"I leave myself in your hands, my lord," said Dalham; "for you have displayed so much generous friendship towards me, and I entertain such a high opinion of your prudence and sagacity——"

"Let us both reflect profoundly and maturely for at least four-and-twenty hours," interjected the nobleman. "We will meet again to-morrow precisely at this hour; and perhaps you will come to me at the hotel where I am staying. You must inquire for me as Mr. Hargrave. We will then and there compare notes—we will ascertain to what respective issues our own separate meditations have led—and we will decide how to act."

"Be it as you say," rejoined Sir Roderick; and after having paid his respects to the two young ladies, he took his departure.

In the evening of that same day accident furnished Lord Ormsby with some very material links in the clue which was already attained towards the unravelment of a certain mystery: but this is not the place to enter into details. Suffice it to say that when Sir Roderick Dalham called next day upon Lord Ormsby at his hotel, there was not the slightest difficulty in arriving at a decision as to the course of action which was now to be pursued. For the two or three following days Ormsby and Dalham held frequent conferences, not merely with each other, but likewise with two or three strange men who were evidently employed in some task as important as it was mysterious.

And now the funeral of old Mr. Barrington took place; and the plaintiff in the memorable lawsuit which had so recently been decided, was consigned to his last resting-place. The corpse of Mr. Barrington was followed to the tomb by Sir Roderick Dalham, the legal gentlemen who had been engaged on his side in the suit, and the eccentric Mr. Robus, who happened to obtain his release from Whitecross Street Prison the very day before the obsequies were solemnized.

The funeral of Sir John Dalham was to take place on the following day. Mr. Timperley, as the sole executor, of course managed everything. He invited but a very few persons to attend; for indeed Sir John had but few friends, and there were no legatees mentioned in the will. The funeral party was assembled at the villa at about eleven in the forenoon; and the corpse was to be interred in a neighbouring church. No invitation had been sent to Sir Roderick Dalham; and when one of the company whisperingly asked Mr. Timperley whether he expected the new Baronet to be present, the answer was, "I really do not know. He was discarded by his father; and therefore, as the executor of the late Sir John, I have not deemed it my duty to request the attendance of Sir Roderick. I hope he will have the good taste to remain away. Of course you are aware that he married not merely without his father's consent, but even in contradiction to all the old Baronet's very natural prejudices and wishes."

"But really Mr. Timperley, between you and me," said the gentleman, "I think that Sir Roderick was old enough to judge for himself. I know that he must be forty, though he looks several years younger——"

"Whatever differences there may have been betwixt his father and himself, do not regard us,

sir," rejoined Mr. Timperley, with a certain degree of sternness. "They are domestic and family matters, which are invested with their own special sanctity."

"Oh, to be sure! to be sure!" ejaculated the gentleman. "But what if, after all, Sir Roderick Dalham should present himself as chief mourner at the funeral?"

Mr. Timperley reflected grimly for a few moments; and then he said, "Well, of course, for decency's sake we should allow him to have his own way. But the time is at hand!" he added, pulling out his watch: "the funeral equippage are in readiness——"

"I thought you said there was one more guest to arrive? Ah, here he is, doubtless!"

The drawing-room door was thrown open; and the footman announced Sir Roderick Dalham.

An angry flush passed for a moment over the lawyer's countenance; but immediately recovering himself, he advanced, and with a low bow said in a subdued tone, "Since you have thought fit to come, Sir Roderick, in order to be present on this solemn occasion, I can only give you the assurance that you are welcome—notwithstanding the harsh terms in which you thought fit to address me the other day. But let me hope that by the grave of your lamented father all rancours and animosities will be forgotten. Ah! you have a friend with you?"

Sir Roderick was in deep mourning; and a person, also dressed in black, was standing a little way behind him, hovering upon the threshold, as if afraid of committing an indiscretion by advancing completely into the room. Without making any specific reply to Mr. Timperley's sententious speech, Sir Roderick Dalham contented himself by saying simply, "Allow me to introduce Mr. Devon."

The individual from the doorway stepped forward, and bowed to the lawyer and the assembled guests. Mr. Timperley returned the salutation with a certain degree of stiffness and constraint, at the same time eyeing Mr. Devon askance. Meanwhile Sir Roderick advanced into the room, and shook hands pointedly with the guests who were previously assembled there, as if thus to show a marked contrast between his behaviour to them, and the freezing contempt not unmingled with abhorrence, that characterized his demeanour towards Timperley.

"Who is Mr. Devon?" whispered one to another.

Heads were shaken: no one knew. The question was put in a subdued tone to Mr. Timperley by the gentleman with whom he had previously been conversing.

"I do not know," was the response,—"unless he is some pettifogging lawyer whom Sir Roderick has brought to proclaim a protest against the will when it is presently read. Not that I remember any such name down in the Law List; and you can judge by the fellow's sinister hang-dog countenance whether he is either very gentlemanly or very respectable."

"Well," said the former speaker, "I really do not think that there is anything so very forbidding in Mr. Devon's appearance. There is certainly a great deal of shrewdness and keenness in his eyes—but nothing sinister or downcast."

At this moment the guest who had previously been awaited was announced; and Mr. Timperley said, "Well, gentlemen, there is nothing to detain us—the party is complete—and I think we may set off."

As he slowly looked around, he met the keen eye of Mr. Devon which were riveted upon him; and a certain sensation of uneasiness crept shudderingly over Mr. Timperley. Not that any definite cause of fear suggested itself, beyond the notion that probably the will was to be disputed: but for this Mr. Timperley in reality cared very little, as he knew that it was perfectly valid, and that the disinheritance of Sir Roderick by his father was a deed which, considering the circumstance of his marriage so entirely against his sire's wishes, would be sanctioned by the law-courts. Nevertheless though entertaining so strong a conviction on this point, Mr. Timperley could not help quailing beneath the searching regards of Mr. Devon—for the simple reason perhaps that conscience, when making men cowards, fills their minds with vague fears and unknown terrors;—and of a surety the conscience of Mr. Timperley was not the purest nor clearest in the world!

The coffin was conveyed down to the hearse; and Sir Roderick Dalham undisputedly took his position as chief mourner. Indeed, Mr. Timperley not merely resigned the post with an appearance of the most delicate readiness; but he likewise took such a modest place in the procession as it issued from the house, that it led him to occupy a seat in the third mourning coach. Indeed, he had carefully studied to avoid being in the same vehicle with Sir Roderick Dalham; but he now found himself precisely opposite to Mr. Devon, whose keen looks appeared to be fixed more scrutinizingly than ever on the countenance of the quailing lawyer. Mr. Timperley plucked up his courage as the procession moved away; and he tried to browbeat Mr. Devon with his regards,—riveting his gaze fiercely upon him, as much as to say, "Why do you stare at me, sir?" Mr. Devon's eyes did not however wink; but they slowly withdrew their looks, the whole demeanour of the individual being perfectly calm and self-possessed.

"A very melancholy occasion this, Mr. Devon!" said Timperley, now adopting a conciliatory bearing.

"Melancholy for whom, sir?" asked the individual thus addressed. "For Sir Roderick Dalham? If this be your meaning, it is a melancholy occasion!"—and he spoke with a calm severity of voice.

"Oh, of course! of course!" said Mr. Timperley, flinching nervously with his black gloves, which he had not as yet put on; then again plucking up his presence of mind, he said, "You knew the late Sir John, I presume?"

"I have seen him, sir," was the curt response.

"Only I was thinking," proceeded Timperley, "that I never had experienced the pleasure of meeting you before at the villa."

"Perhaps not, sir," said Mr. Devon; and then he stared fixedly at the lawyer for a few moments; but again withdrawing his looks as if there had really been nothing significant in the survey, he turned them in a leisurely way towards the window

"You are a friend of Sir Roderick's, I presume?" said Timperley after a pause.

"If I did not know Sir Roderick," rejoined Mr. Dalham, "I should scarcely be here on the present occasion."

"Hem!" said Mr. Timperley, now nervously drawing off one of those gloves which he had just put on. "A lawyer, I presume, sir?"

"What makes you think so, sir?" asked Mr. Devon.

"Come, sir," said Timperley, bending still farther forward and speaking in a still lower tone so as not to be overheard by the other mourners present in the coach; "there ought to be professional confidence between us. If there is to be any legal squabbling, let it be conducted in a straightforward manner. You know where to find me: I shall not run away——"

"I don't suppose you will, sir," answered Devon; and again his keen eyes flung forth a glance of mysterious significance at the lawyer, who quailed and shrank in spite of himself. "But you are mistaken, Mr. Timperley: I do not belong to the same profession as you do."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Devon again looked out of the window, with the air of one who did not wish to prolong a discourse in which he was made the object of a disagreeable catechising. Mr. Timperley—half under the influence of a vague terror, and half enraged at the person who would not satisfy his curiosity—could scarcely prevent himself from asking, "Then pray who the deuce are you, sir?"—but he bit his lip and held his peace.

The place of sepulture was soon reached; and during the ceremony it twice or thrice struck Mr. Timperley that as he furtively looked towards Mr. Devon, that individual's eyes were riveted keenly upon him, so that it actually seemed to the affrighted and bewildered attorney as if those eyes were never lifted off him.

At length the ceremony was over; the mourners returned to the coaches—and the way was taken back to the villa. This time Mr. Timperley purposely avoided being in the same vehicle with Mr. Devon; and when no longer under the influence of that person's keen searching eyes, he said to himself, "After all, it was very foolish on my part to be intimidated or annoyed by the fellow! He can do me no harm; and as he says he is not a lawyer, there is not even any objection that he can raise to the will. He is doubtless only a witness whom Sir Roderick has brought with him."

The villa was reached; and as Sir Roderick alighted from the first coach which drew up, he exchanged a rapid glance of significance with the valet James Nash, who slightly nodded his head in token of an affirmative. The company of mourners ascended to the drawing room, where cake and wine were served up, according to custom, on such occasions; as if the saddest ceremonies must necessarily be imbued with more or less of the spirit of merry-making from the guzzling and wine-bibbing habits of the higher orders!

A few of the guests partook of a little refreshment; but it may be observed that neither Mr. Timperley, nor Sir Roderick Dalham, nor Mr. Devon, advanced towards the sideboard. Perhaps they each thought that it was necessary to keep their heads clear for whatever business might be on hand; though whether Mr. Devon himself had

any special object in being of the party, remains to be seen.

"Now, gentlemen," said Mr. Timperley, "if you will be kind enough to take your seats, I will lose no time in communicating the contents of the lamented Sir John Dalham's will."

Sir Roderick was the first to place himself at the table; and he unhesitatingly took the upper seat, as if he were the master there. Mr. Devon modestly took the lowest seat; and the other guests sat down without reference to any particular degrees of order. Mr. Timperley unlocked a writing-desk which had just been brought in by one of the footmen; and he produced a sealed packet. Then, placing himself on Sir Roderick Dalham's right hand, he proceeded to break the seal, saying, "Gentlemen, you are about to learn the testamentary wishes of the deceased friend whose remains we have just consigned to the tomb."

"But perhaps there may be others," said Sir Roderick Dalham, "who are interested in hearing this will read:"—and while the words were still floating from his lips, he rose from his seat and rang the bell.

"Others, Sir Roderick?" ejaculated Timperley, his brows corrugating with an access of rage. "What does this mean? Who pretends to be the master here?"

"Not I assuredly, Mr. Timperley," responded Dalham. "From the day of my father's death, until within these two hours, I have not crossed the threshold of the villa. But though I do not affect any authority which I have no right to exercise——"

Sir Roderick's speech was abruptly cut short by the throwing open of the door of the drawing-room; and it was the valet James Nash who made his appearance, simply saying, "Some gentlemen, if you please, Sir Roderick."

"Gentlemen?" echoed Timperley: and leaning with his two hands upon the table as he kicked back the chair from which he had started up, he bent forward with eager looks to catch the first glimpse of those who were about to enter.

There was the tread of several footsteps up the staircase; and behold! a procession of the late Sir John Dalham's creditors entered the apartment. The van was led by the lawyers who had conducted the Chancery suit; then came wine-merchants, upholsterers, and jewellers, and several other tradesmen,—the number being about fourteen or fifteen in all. For a moment an ashy pallor overspread Timperley's countenance: then it flushed with the hectic glow of excitement;—and with an ironical smile he flung a look upon Sir Roderick, saying in a voice that was barely audible, "This is a pretty farce that you have prepared as a sequence to the tragedy!"

Sir Roderick disdained to reply,—disdained even to notice the lawyer by a look: but bowing courteously to the procession of creditors, he said, "Be seated, gentlemen. You are even more interested in the present proceedings than most of us."

"I am sure, Sir Roderick," said Mr. Timperley, now assuming the most amiable look that he could possibly put on—for he thought that though the proceeding was a vexing and annoying one, yet there was really naught in it which need fill him with any more serious apprehension; "I am

sure, Sir Roderick, that if it were your wish for these gentlemen to be present, I could not possibly entertain the slightest objection. On the contrary, I am glad to meet them. There are some with whom I have long been acquainted—my brother professionals for instance;" and Mr. Timperley endeavoured to smile jocosely.

The brother professionals, however, to whom he alluded, did not seem to be at all inclined to place themselves on familiar terms with that individual: for they only bowed coldly and distantly.

"I will proceed, gentlemen, to read the will," said Mr. Timperley: and now, as he slowly looked around him, his eyes were again met by the keen regards of Mr. Devon. Timperley had forgotten him for the last few minutes, during the excitement produced by the entrance of the creditors; and now he was reminded of his presence with a suddenness and a vividness that carried an ominous and nervous sensation to the lawyer's heart. His lips were observed to quiver and his hands trembled as he unfolded the testamentary document; and holding up his double eye-glasses, he affected to study the contents of the paper for a few moments—but it was really to gain time in order that he might recover his self-possession. He beheld no definite danger before him: he could not see how any real peril could possibly smite him; but, as we have before said, his soul was a prey to vague terrors and an irresistible uneasiness.

He began to read the will very slowly and deliberately, measuring his words in such a way that he exercised a sufficient control over his voice to prevent it from trembling. The document was very short, and was simply to the effect that after the payment of all just debts and liabilities, the testator disposed of the residue of his property, whatsoever might be the amount, in the way already known to the reader: namely, that one-third should be distributed amongst certain hospitals and philanthropic institutions, and the remaining two-thirds should go "to his faithful friend Thomas Timperley," &c.

No astonishment was evinced by anybody present at the provisions of this will; for its nature had been pretty widely whispered abroad within the first two or three days after the breath was out of Sir John Dalham's body. But there were many angry and threatening regards fixed upon Mr. Timperley; for when the creditors sold him their claims at ten or twenty per cent., they were of course very far from foreseeing that he was Sir John Dalham's heir—that he knew exactly what amount of property the deceased Baronet would leave behind him—and that he was therefore making an excellent bargain for himself by the purchase of those debts.

"You have heard the will, gentlemen," said Sir Roderick Dalham, when Mr. Timperley had concluded the reading of the document; "and I beg you at once to understand that on my own personal account I offer it not the slightest opposition. On the contrary, I am anxious that its provisions should be carried out to the very letter—yes, to the very letter, mind!" ejaculated Sir Roderick with emphasis.

"And you may rest assured, sir," said Mr. Timperley, with a sneer, "that it will be carried out to the very letter."

"Your meaning and mine, Mr. Timperley," resumed Sir Roderick, "are evidently very different. The preamble of this will provides that all my father's debts shall be paid—"

"And they are all settled," ejaculated Mr. Timperley. "I have the receipts in full, signed by all those gentlemen whom you have so uselessly troubled to come to this meeting."

"The debts may be settled, Mr. Timperley," said Sir Roderick; "but they are not paid."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," cried Timperley, with another sneer. "In a legal point of view the settlement of debts is their payment. Everybody knows this."

"I am well aware," said Sir Roderick, "that you have the strict letter of the law on your side, Mr. Timperley. But I now give you a solemn warning,—that if you would in any way endeavour to make your peace with your fellow-men, you will commence by doing an act of justice on the present occasion."

"What is the meaning of this language, sir?" demanded Timperley, rising from his seat and fixing his looks fiercely upon the Baronet. "How dare you take me to task? I stand upon my just rights. You yourself have admitted that I have the law in my favour—and that is sufficient! We will not budge words."

"Take heed, Mr. Timperley," said Dalham, again speaking in a voice of solemn warning,— "take heed I say, lest at the very moment when you deem yourself strongest you are in reality weakest, and when you think your footsteps safest they are veritably the most imperilled!"

"This is monstrous!" ejaculated Timperley, whose rage now got the better of every other feeling. "You, the unfeeling son who flew in the face of an affectionate father's wishes!—you, the disowned and the discarded—having no right even to enter within these walls!—you, a mere interloper and intruder—"

"Beware, sir—beware!" ejaculated Sir Roderick; "the thunder-cloud is about to burst above your head! the abyss is yawning at your feet!"

These words produced an immense sensation on the spectators of the singular scene; and Timperley was again smitten with a vague terror. He swept his eyes around: there was a seat empty—it was Mr. Devon's. Then it was with a sudden start that Timperley became aware that this mysterious individual was now posted immediately behind him. There he stood—motionless, cool, and apparently unconcerned; and yet there was something in the keen expression of his eyes which smote Timperley with the conviction that whatever danger (if any) might threaten him, would emanate from that quarter!

"You have no more business to detain you here, gentlemen," said Mr. Timperley: "and I myself shall take my departure, as I have business to transact elsewhere."

"For the last time," exclaimed Roderick Dalham, "I conjure you to listen to the dictates of rectitude and honour, by giving those persons their just due:—and he pointed towards the array of creditors."

"Enough of these impertinences!" exclaimed Timperley, again plucking up his courage; because he naturally thought from the words of the Baronet, that he was simply being appealed to in

a case where actual coercion was known to be impossible. "I wish you good day, gentlemen,"—and gathering up his papers, Mr. Timperley was about to depart.

"You go with me, sir," said a stern voice close to his ear: and at the same time a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"With you, sir?"—and it was with a sudden start that Timperley, turning round, thus confronted Mr. Devon.

"Yes—with me, sir. You are my prisoner."

"Your prisoner?"—and Timperley became as white as a sheet. "For—for—what?" he gasped forth? "But, pooh! this is ridiculous!" he ejaculated, all in a moment recovering himself. "It is a trick—or else a perjured tongue has charged me with some offence. Perhaps you think there is something wrong about the will? You may summon the witnesses—they are here, beneath this roof—"

"I have nothing to do with the will, Mr. Timperley," interrupted Devon.

"Then who are you, sir?" asked the lawyer: and again an expression of vague terror flitted over his countenance: "who are you, sir?"

"An officer of justice," was the reply. "I am Sergeant Wrightson of the Detective Force."

"But what—what—what—Mr. Wrightson," faltered out the wretched Timperley,— "have you against me?"

"I charge you, sir," replied the detective, "with a crime which for upwards of a twelvemonth has been involved in the deepest mystery. In a word, sir, I charge you with the murder of Mrs. Chicklade."

"My God!" moaned Timperley: and aghast—quivering—annihilated, he sank down upon his chair.

Immense was the sensation that was produced upon the spectators of this scene—with the exception of Sir Roderick, who, as a matter of course, was well aware of the tremendous charge that was about to issue from the lips of the detective against the miserable attorney. But all in a moment a new phase in the scene developed itself: for Mr. Timperley, rising up from his seat—outwardly calm and collected—said in a firm voice, "Gentlemen, you need not be surprised if for a moment I was overwhelmed by an accusation as unexpected as it is preposterous. It is a base trick concocted in that quarter:"—and he pointed towards Roderick Dalham. "Why, all the world knows that his own wife was accused of the murder, and that her acquittal arose from some circumstances which are involved in mystery—"

"Silence, sir!" exclaimed Roderick; "malice not the character of the purest and best of women! Mr. Wrightson, do your duty!"

"Oh, I will go with you as a matter of course, Mr. Wrightson," said Timperley; "and you will soon see, gentlemen, what the magistrate will say to this ridiculous charge."

Thus speaking, he thrust his papers into his pocket: and then taking up his hat, he accompanied the detective from the room, without again looking to the right or left; and though the expression of his countenance was firm and rigid, yet it was remarked by several persons present that he seemed to stagger once or twice and then catch himself up suddenly as he proceeded towards the door



"Gentlemen," said Sir Roderick Dalham to the creditors, when the detective officer had disappeared with his prisoner, "I regret that I have not succeeded in obtaining for you a recognition of your just claims; but though hitherto the villain has remained hardened, you have yet in your favour the chances of what the influence of a felon's gaol may accomplish."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CHAIN OF EVIDENCE.

We may now proceed to detail the circumstances which ultimately led to the arrest of Mr. Timperley on the very serious charge of having been the murderer of the woman Chicklade.

The private communication which the valet

No. 79.—AGNES.

James Nash made to Sir Roderick Dalham, was to the following effect:—"I remember that on the very day when that woman was assassinated, I saw Mr. Timperley in conversation with her. I know it was the same woman, because I subsequently went and saw her corpse at the public-house where the inquest was held. It was also in the very lane where the woman was found dead that I saw Mr. Timperley with her. It was also at such an hour in the afternoon, that considering other circumstances which were proved on Lady Dalham's (Winifred's) trial, might well agree with the supposition that Mr. Timperley was the murderer. He did not notice me at the time; because I was returning hastily to the villa from an errand on which I had been sent by Sir John Dalham—and I forced my way through the hedge a little higher up in the lane in order to take a short cut across the fields. When I afterwards heard that the woman had been found murdered, I did not for a

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moment suspect Mr. Timperley: I could not have thought of such a thing: I believed him to be a gentleman of the highest respectability, and that it was therefore a mere trifling and insignificant coincidence that he should have been seen speaking to that woman. I should have conceived that I was insulting him by even mentioning the fact at all; for it would have looked like throwing a suspicion upon him. Therefore I beld my peace; and I was glad that I did so, for very soon afterwards I heard the rumour that the murderer had been discovered and was arrested. But even when after a time the young lady was acquitted, my suspicions did not settle on Mr. Timperley: indeed I had almost ceased to recollect the little incident of my having seen him and the old woman together. But now that the mask has suddenly fallen from his countenance and that I find him to be a villain—now that I know him to be capable of any wickedness—the incident has come back to my recollection, fraught with a stupendous significance!”

Such was the strain in which James Nash had spoken to Sir Roderick Dalham; and the latter resolved to consult Lord Ormsby.

“It is scarcely possible,” he thought to himself, “that Timperley could have been the assassin of the old woman; and yet the mystery of such a murder can only be cleared up by the development of some extraordinary circumstances. Who can tell what motives the man may have had to perpetrate such a crime? More wondrous things have occurred in the world than that he should ultimately prove to be the assassin of Mrs. Chicklade!”

The reader will now understand how it was that Sir Roderick abstained from mentioning to his wife the intelligence he had received from the valet; inasmuch as the topic of the mysterious murder in the lane was naturally a very sore one with Winifred,—not because she fancied that her innocence was doubted, but because it was calculated to conjure up so many painful associations,—her arrest, her imprisonment, the combination of circumstances against her, and the ordeal of her trial!

Sir Roderick consulted Lord Ormsby, as we described in the preceding chapter; and this nobleman counselled a further pause for four-and-twenty hours, that in the meanwhile they might both deliberate on the best course that was to be pursued. But, as we have also stated in the previous chapter, something occurred in the interval to strengthen most materially the suspicion which had been excited against Timperley. What this occurrence was—or rather chain of occurrences—cannot be described in a few words; and we must therefore proceed to give the details at length.

We are about to speak of the evening of that same day on which Sir Roderick Dalham consulted Lord Ormsby. It was about nine o'clock on that evening—the November weather was raw and cold, and a mist which had prevailed for the last hour or two was beginning to turn into a drizzling rain—when Lord Ormsby, alighting from a cab at the bottom of Albany Street, crossed the New Road and quickly penetrated into Norton Street. We have alluded to this neighbourhood in one of the early chapters of our narrative; and we then described it as being a street that was not famed

for its exceeding respectability, but that on the contrary it was notorious for its numerous houses of evil repute. Nevertheless, there are some few reputable habitations there, and three or four good shops. Indeed, as Lord Ormsby, drawing his mantle more closely around his form, was pushing his way along the street, he was suddenly struck by beholding a picture in the window of a print-shop. It was a well-executed lithograph portrait of the Hon. Mrs. Hardress; and the likeness had at once attracted the nobleman from the similitude which it bore to the water-colour drawing executed by his daughter Agnes. This lithograph belonged to a series entitled “Portraits of the Aristocracy;” and all those which were as yet published, were arrayed in that window. There were about a dozen; and amongst them were the Hon. Hector and Mrs. Hardress.

Having contemplated these portraits for a few moments, Lord Ormsby continued his way; and as he examined the numbers on the street doors, he said to himself, “I am almost certain that it is the right one which I am carrying in my mind! Yes—I could not have forgotten; for the occurrence has always been deeply impressed upon my memory! Yet the inquiry I am about to make is probably useless—”

Here he stopped short, alike in his musings and in his walk; for he had just reached the particular house for which he was looking. He was raising his hand to the knocker, when he thought to himself, “Yes—it will positively prove vain and futile!—mere trouble for nothing, besides the loathsome idea of entering such a house as this! Twenty years ago!—and poor creatures of this class doubtless change their habitations a thousand times within such a period! And yet, after all, it is just possible that I may hear of her? What if she be in distress, and a pittance from my purse would relieve her?”

This last consideration settled the question in the mind of the generous nobleman; and he knocked at the door of the house. The summons was almost immediately answered by a stout female, upwards of forty years of age, whose apparel was replete with tawdriness and whose looks were full of boldness. Handsome she had evidently been in former years; for her features were good—but her cheeks were covered with rouge, and she had a certain air which denoted that she was not averse to a drop of strong waters. As for her figure, it had no doubt once been a fine one; but all youthful symmetry was lost in a development of the proportions into the most obese exuberance.

“Pray walk in, sir,” she at once said, with a certain familiarity of tone which evidently was habitual with her.

A sense of loathing for an instant held Lord Ormsby back; there was something disgusting and revolting in the meretricious aspect of that woman.

“Ah!” she ejaculated, as a sudden idea evidently struck her: “perhaps you, sir, are Mr. Timperley?”

The question was astounding; and for a moment—but only a moment—Ormsby felt bewildered. Then instantaneously recovering his presence of mind, he said, “Ah! it is *here*, then, that Mr. Timperley is expected?”

“Yes, sir—’tis here. Pray walk in,” said the

woman: "it is all right! I suppose you are Mr. Timperley—or else perhaps a friend?"

"Yes—I am a friend of Mr. Timperley's," responded Ormsby; "and I need scarcely tell you that as he is particularly engaged——"

"I understand, sir," interjected the woman: "he begged you to call to know what the business is?"

"Exactly so," said Ormsby. "And you are——"

"I am Mrs. Maddox, sir, who wrote the note to Mr. Timperley."

"To be sure! to be sure!" said Ormsby, just as if he were perfectly conversant with the contents of the note that had been written. "Mrs. Maddox, to be sure!"

He followed the woman into a well-furnished parlour, where a cheerful fire was blazing in the grate and a lamp was burning on the table. Mrs. Maddox begged him to be seated: and he accordingly took a chair; for accident had suddenly thrown him into the current of an adventure which he was determined to pursue to the very utmost, inasmuch as everything which now regarded Mr. Timperley had become of the greatest moment on account of the suspicion excited against him by the valet James Nash.

"I think I have seen you before, sir," said Mrs. Maddox, who having taken a chair, was looking very hard at Lord Ormsby.

"It may be," said the nobleman, who thought that perhaps her observation was only an indirect way of asking what was his name. "Come, let us enter upon the business which has brought me hither—I mean to say on behalf of Mr. Timperley. If it is necessary that you should know my name, I shall have no hesitation in communicating it."

"Not at all necessary, sir, unless you think fit," rejoined Mrs. Maddox. "O: course, in dealing with you it is just the same as if I was treating with Mr. Timperley himself, since you come on his behalf."

"Precisely so," said the nobleman. "And now be so kind as to explain——But Ah!" he exclaimed, as an idea suddenly struck him: "we may as well have a glass of wine!"—and he flung a couple of sovereigns on the table.

The woman's eyes glistened as she took up the money; and she was about to ring the bell, when Lord Ormsby said, "No—do not let anybody else see me here."

"Ah, true!" ejaculated the woman. "I forgot that you might be particular. I will go and get the wine myself."

She left the room; and Ormsby mentally ejaculated, "This coincidence is truly wonderful! Whatsoever regards Timperley is sure to be of importance! It was a happy idea of mine to give this woman wine to drink; for it will render her all the more communicative!"

Mrs. Maddox speedily returned to the parlour, bringing a bottle of wine and glasses, which she placed upon the table. She did not however give any change in the shape of money to Lord Ormsby: neither did he expect or mean it. She filled two glasses; and while she drank off the contents of her own, Ormsby just touched his with his lips and then thrust it away from him.

"Now," he said, "be pleased to enter upon your explanations."

"Well, sir," began the woman, fidgetting about somewhat with her kerchief, "you must know, sir, that I am in a little trouble."

"Well, proceed," said Lord Ormsby. "You need not fear to be candid."

"I am sure I'm very much obliged to you, sir, for your kindness," said the woman: "and if I did use anything like a threatening expression in the note, I did not mean to give offence."

"Threatening expression?" said Ormsby, assuming a thoughtful air. "Well, I read the note——though not very attentively perhaps——"

"I don't know, sir, as it was exactly threatening," said Mrs. Maddox: "I only mean that when I said in it that Mr. Timperley had better come for his own sake, or it might be the worse for him——"

"Well then, you said what you meant, I presume?" observed Lord Ormsby. "And so, now I am here on Mr. Timperley's behalf. Proceed with your explanations. You are in a little trouble. Of what description is it?"

"Why, the truth is, sir, I am bothered by a landlord who never shows any mercy; and so he has gone to extremes and put an execution in my house."

"Well, and you expect Mr. Timperley to assist you in the matter?" said Ormsby. "In what way?"

"Well, sir, there is only one way that I know of:—and now the woman fidgetted with her wine-glass.

"To be sure! there's only one way!" interjected the nobleman. "You want Mr. Timperley to pay the money? Come, take another glass of wine, and tell me the exact truth of the matter. On my side I will frankly admit that I am charged by Mr. Timperley to settle the business according to my own discretion."

Again the woman's eyes glistened, and she helped herself to another glass of wine.

"Well, sir," she said, "I thought that Mr. Timperley wouldn't object to advancing me a few pounds; for if he only came to know how I have kept a certain secret——"

"But he does not know anything of the sort," said Ormsby, who, taking his cue from the woman's own words, thought he might venture on this observation.

"No, sir—I don't suppose he does," she immediately rejoined; "and I am sure if I had not been in such trouble I should not have thought of applying to him."

"And what is this secret which you have so faithfully kept?" asked Ormsby. "Tell me at once: for the reward I shall give you on Mr. Timperley's behalf will be in proportion to the importance of the service you have rendered him. Look! I have the power to fulfil my promise:—and taking out his pocket-book, he produced a roll of bank notes, on more than one of which the devouring eyes of the woman caught the word FIFTY in the corner.

"Well, I must tell you, sir," she resumed, "that it was something about Mrs. Chicklade."

"Ah!" ejaculated Ormsby: and he mechanically drew his chair closer to Mrs. Maddox. "It referred to Mrs. Chicklade, you said!"

"Yes, sir—the poor woman that was murdered. And of course if I had only mentioned a certain

fact, it might have looked queer even *then*: but with what I *now* know——”

“Tell me everything,” said Ormsby; “for I am distressed on Mr. Timperley’s account—I see that it is indeed something serious; but gold shall purchase your secrecy! Explain yourself. Did you know Mrs. Chicklade?”

“Did I know her, sir! Ah, full well! Why, she was lodging in this very house at the time she met her death!”

“Is this possible?” ejaculated Ormsby. “I was not aware of it!”

“But I suppose you must have read the murder at the time,” said the woman; “and you must have seen that Mrs. Chicklade lived at a particular number in Norton Street; and so when Mr. Timperley asked you to call here, I wonder it did not strike you that it was the very same house?”

“Oh! but I read the murder hurriedly at the time—and I remembered it imperfectly!” replied Ormsby.

“Depend upon it,” rejoined Mrs. Maddox, “Mr. Timperley must have noticed the coincidence: and that was why he did not like to come himself. So he sent you. But no matter! It was here that poor Mrs. Chicklade lodged at the time. I had known her for years—she had seen many an up and down——”

“Well, well,” interposed Ormsby: “but what of Mr. Timperley in reference to that woman?”

“Why, you must know, sir,” pursued Mrs. Maddox, “that the moment I heard that poor Mrs. Chicklade had been found murdered—indecided, I went and identified the corpse at the tavern—I took possession of all the papers in her box; and perhaps you wouldn’t believe me if I was to say that I didn’t think of reading them.”

“Of course you *did* read them. That was natural!” interjected Ormsby.

“Well, sir—and amongst those papers was a letter from Mr. Timperley. It bore the date of only the day before; and it was evidently in answer to one which Mrs. Chicklade must have written to him. He wrote in great terror, beseeching her to keep silence in reference to some discovery she had made—it expressed his wonder how she could possibly have made that discovery at all——”

“Did it not allude more explicitly,” inquired Ormsby, “to the nature of the discovery itself?”

“Let me think?” said Mrs. Maddox. “Ah! I remember! It did allude to some papers respecting a peerage and an estate; but I don’t think it mentioned any names.”

“I daresay,” thought Ormsby to himself, “that woman Chicklade had by some means or another discovered how Timperley had preserved the forged documents which he found in Waldron’s office, and which related to my affairs.—Proceed, my good woman,” he said, addressing himself to Mrs. Maddox. “You were telling me the contents of the letter which Mr. Timperley wrote to Mrs. Chicklade. What else did he say therein?”

“Oh, let me see? He said that though it was a very large sum which she had demanded—five thousand pounds—yet she should have it; and he bade her meet him on the following evening at nine o’clock, on Waterloo Bridge, and he would be prepared with the amount. But alas, poor

woman! that evening never came for her: she was murdered in the afternoon!”

“But the letter?” ejaculated Ormsby: “you have kept it?”

“No, sir: I gave it up the very evening after the murder took place,” answered Mrs. Maddox.

“Gave it up?” echoed Ormsby. “To whom?”

“Why, sir, a young lady came, with a great thick veil over her face, so that I could not catch the slightest glimpse of her features——”

“Then how do you know she was young?”

“You shall hear presently. This lady came and proposed to buy up every document, paper, letter, even to the veriest scrap, that I might have found in Mrs. Chicklade’s box. She offered me twenty guineas; and when I saw that she was so eager to have the letters——”

“You endeavoured to drive a better bargain?” interjected Ormsby.

“Of course, sir,” replied Mrs. Maddox, with a knowing look, “I was anxious to get as much as I possibly could for the papers.”

“And no doubt,” said Ormsby, “it was with the view of selling Mr. Timperley’s letter back to him at a good price that you did not give it up into the hands of the police?”

“Well, sir, perhaps there was something in that,” rejoined the woman, laughing; and now she helped herself to another glass of wine. “But I must tell you candidly I did not of course think that Mr. Timperley had anything to do with the murder of Mrs. Chicklade—no more than the young lady herself, who came to bargain about the letters; because Winifred Barrington was already in custody—she had been examined before the police-magistrate—and who could doubt at the time that she was the guilty party?”

“And why did you suppose that the young lady wanted the letters?” asked Lord Ormsby.

“I naturally fancied,” rejoined Mrs. Maddox, “that the lady’s character had been compromised—that she had either become a mother while unwedded, or that she had carried on some intrigue, and that Mrs. Chicklade had been an agent or a go-between——”

“Ah, I comprehend!” said Lord Ormsby. “And therefore you concluded the bargain?”

“I made a bargain with her and gave up the papers, Mr. Timperley’s letter being amongst them. I suppose the young lady saw that I was anxious to catch a glimpse of her face; and so she concluded I must be full of curiosity with regard to her. Well, and so I naturally was. But what did she do? She actually secreted the key of the street-door; and as she went out she looked the door and dropped the key down the area. That was to prevent herself from being followed before she should have time to get to a sufficient distance from the house.”

“And did her stratagem succeed?” inquired Ormsby, who was burning with impatience to learn the end of the narrative and see how it would again connect itself with Mr. Timperley.

“I had no intention of following the lady,” replied Mrs. Maddox,—“though, as I have said before, I naturally felt a great curiosity concerning her. But clever as she was, she was baffled by an accident—though up to this day I daresay she suspects it not. I will tell you how it was, sir. When she called at the house my servant-woman

opened the door; and she particularly noticed the fine tall figure, the style of dress, and the thick black veil concealing the countenance. While I was engaged bargaining with the young lady, my servant went out for some purpose; and lo and behold! as she was coming through Fitzroy Square on her way home, she was suddenly struck by perceiving the tall lady with the veil. A gentleman was following—the lady raised her veil—and then, as the light of the lamp fell upon her countenance, the features were completely revealed to the view of my servant. When she came home she told me what had happened, and she described the young lady's face."

"Well," said Ormsby, "and did that description lead you to the discovery of who the young lady was?"

"Not at the time," responded Mrs. Maddox. "Indeed it was only yesterday that the discovery was made. I have still got that servant-woman with me; and last evening she comes in, exclaiming, 'Now I know who the young lady was.'—'What young lady?' I asked, for the adventure had gone out of my mind.—'Why, the young lady with the black veil, upwards of a year ago,' said the servant-woman.—'And who is she?' I inquired.—'Just come with me to the print-shop,' she says, 'and there you'll see her face exactly as I described it after I came in that night from Fitzroy Square.' So I went—and I not only saw the picture, but I bought one of the copies. And here it is, sir!"

Thus speaking, Mrs. Maddox opened a drawer in the table; and producing a lithographic print, displayed it before the nobleman.

"Ah!" he ejaculated: for it was the likeness of the Hon. Mrs. Hardress!

"Of course you knew who she was in a moment," said Mrs. Maddox; "because, as you are a friend of Mr. Timperley's, you must be acquainted with his niece."

"Yes, yes," said the nobleman: "that is his niece Cicely!"

"The instant I found out that the young lady was the Hon. Mrs. Hardress," pursued Mrs. Maddox, "I set to work to know who the Hon. Mrs. Hardress might be. The *Peerage* soon gave me that information; and to my surprise I found that she was niece to Thomas Timperley Esq., solicitor, of Lincoln's Inn Fields!"

"And it was his niece Cicely who purchased those papers from you!" ejaculated Ormsby. "Ah!" he thought within himself, as a sudden light flashed upon his mind and he remembered what his daughter Agnes had told him of Cicely,— "no wonder she exercises a strong hold upon her uncle!"

"And so you see, sir," continued Mrs. Maddox, "that when I yesterday discovered that the young lady who came to buy the papers of me was Mr. Timperley's niece, I began to put two and two together—I thought it was very singular—"

"Ah! I comprehended what it is that you suspected!" said Ormsby. "You thought that as Mr. Timperley's niece came to buy up the papers, it was on account of that letter which he had written to Mrs. Chicklade?"

"No doubt of it!" ejaculated the woman: "it is all as clear as daylight! I do not wish to be rude, sir, in speaking of your friend—"

"What! Timperley my friend?" exclaimed Ormsby. "Oh, no! Heaven forbid!"

"Then who are you?" inquired the woman, now turning deadly pale even through her rouge.

"No matter who I am!" replied Ormsby. "Suffice it for you to know that I am not the friend of Timperley."

"But what have I done? what have I done?" cried Mrs. Maddox, wringing her hands. "Perhaps you are an officer of justice? Ah, I thought I had seen you before!—it struck me there was something in your look that was not altogether unknown to me!"

"No—I am not an officer of justice," said Ormsby; "and I do not know that you have very much to fear—"

"But why did you tell me you were a friend of Mr. Timperley? It was shameful! You have taken scandalous advantage of me!"

"I confess that your complaint is not altogether unfounded," said the nobleman; "and it would really be unpardonable if I were to leave you in any painful uncertainty. No, no! I will not! So far from suffering for what you have told me, you shall be rewarded. And you can still farther serve me perhaps," added Ormsby in a musing tone.

"But who are you, sir?" asked the woman: "why did you play me such a trick? how did you know that I had written to Mr. Timperley to beg him to call on me this evening or to-morrow?"

"I knew nothing beyond what your own lips have uttered," replied Ormsby. "I called to make a particular inquiry—an inquiry totally unconnected with Mr. Timperley—"

"And what is that inquiry?" demanded Mrs. Maddox.

"About twenty years ago—you see I am going back to a remote date—"

"Twenty years ago?" echoed Mrs. Maddox. "How did you know that I lodged here twenty years ago?"

"I did not know it. There! your own lips have told it to me!—and in the same way was it that you went on speaking about Mr. Timperley in a manner that afforded me a clue—"

"Yes, yes—I see that now!" said the woman. "But twenty years ago—you were speaking of that remote date—did I know you then?"

"I cannot tell—I should think not," said Ormsby.

"Yes, yes—I am almost convinced that I have seen you before! Why, twenty years ago—"

"There was a young female living in this house," said Ormsby,— "one in whom I took an interest—"

"I remember!" cried Mrs. Maddox, holding up her hands in astonishment. "You mean Lucy Maitland!"

"I do. What has become of her?"

"Oh! she went away almost immediately after you came to see her. I recollect it all well enough now! She was a good girl—she had been seduced—she was in a way to become a mother—but she would not turn into the pathway of crime. Yes—those were her very words! I recollect them as if it was but yesterday they were spoken! And she said that you had saved her!"

"Did she mention my name?" asked Ormsby.

"No—but she told me that she knew it: she

said she should ever remember it in her prayers. I myself was just fresh upon town then; and I recollect that I sympathized with her. A year later I should have laughed at her. But, Ah! you will be surprised—for you do not seem to know it—but that very Mrs. Chicklade—”

“What of her?” demanded Ormsby hastily.

“She was the landlady of this house—yes, the landlady of this house twenty years ago—who turned poor Lucy Maitland out into the streets when she was abandoned by her seducer and had become destitute!”

“Good heavens! is it possible?” exclaimed Ormsby. “Ah! a terrible retribution at length overtook that vile woman!”

“But would you believe it?” cried Mrs. Maddox, as a recollection struck her, “Mrs. Chicklade told me when she was lodging here a few weeks before her death, that she had somewhere or another fallen in with Lucy Maitland—”

“What! at that time?” ejaculated Ormsby.

“Yes—at that time. But she would not tell me where, or how, or under what circumstances she had met her. Perhaps she thought that I might interfere with some plans which she herself had conceived—”

“And thus poor Lucy Maitland lives! That at all events is certain!” exclaimed Ormsby.

“Or at least that she was living about thirteen or fourteen months ago is certain,” said Mrs. Maddox; “because that was the time when Mrs. Chicklade told me so.”

“Have you lived in this house for twenty long years?” inquired Ormsby.

“Oh, no!” replied the woman. “I have seen a great many ups and downs—the story is too long to tell you—but during those twenty years I have lived in at least fifty houses in this and other neighbourhoods. At last I got to be mistress of this house. It was a strange coincidence—the very house where I first dwelt when I was seduced in the country and brought up to London! Mrs. Chicklade too, she saw many reverses; and it was singular also that she should have been landlady of the house when I first came here as a lodger, and that after so long a lapse of time she should have come to lodge with me when I got to be the landlady of it!”

“Yea—it was singular,” observed Ormsby. “But now let us speak of poor Lucy Maitland; and then we must converse on other and more serious subjects. As for the money which you owe your landlord, fear not—it shall be presently forthcoming.”

The woman expressed her gratitude for this assurance; and she chuckled inwardly at the progress that matters were taking, for she saw that with one thing and another she was tolerably certain of clearing a pretty penny for herself.

“Yea,” said Ormsby, “let us speak of Lucy Maitland;” and then he continued, in a sort of audible musing rather than because he was conscious that he was addressing himself to anybody, “Twenty years ago I was a wild fellow. I remember one night I was going to the gambling-house and I encountered the poor girl. She told me her tale: she had been seduced—she was in the way to become a mother—she had been brought up to London by her betrayer and abandoned by him—”

“Did she tell you who her betrayer was?” asked Mrs. Maddox.

“No,” was the response. “She mentioned not his name.”

“Neither to me did she ever mention his name,” said the woman. “She often spoke of him—she loved him well—as I also had loved my betrayer! Ah, I dare say it is the common story of all us unfortunate women!—one tale suits the case of pretty nearly all!”

“Ah! but I think you said that Lucy Maitland was different?” exclaimed Ormsby.

“Oh, yes! she would not go astray,” ejaculated Mrs. Maddox.

“Now look you, let us compare notes and see exactly how it was,” said Ormsby; “for this is a narrative sufficiently interesting to dwell upon. I met her that night, and she told me how she had been abandoned by her seducer, and how her landlady had bidden her go forth into the streets and obtain money as many other women did. And I relieved her—”

“She came home,” interjected Mrs. Maddox, “and said that she had met a young man who had been her saviour. She was deeply thankful!”

“She told me where she lived,” pursued Ormsby, “and the next day I called here. To tell you the truth, I had my doubts in reference to her story, and I was determined to see whether I had been deceived or not.”

“If she told you that she was virtuous except in reference to him whom she loved and who had betrayed her,” said Mrs. Maddox, “she told you nothing but the truth.”

“And that was precisely what she did tell me,” resumed Ormsby; “and when I called here—”

“I remember you, sir! I remember you well!” interrupted the woman. “I will give you a proof of it! You called twice on two consecutive days—and on each occasion I opened you the door!”

“By heaven! is it possible?” exclaimed the nobleman. “I remember a slender, beautiful girl—”

But he stopped short, for he would not hurt the feelings of even the depraved creature who sat opposite to him. But this depraved creature was moved by that reference to by-gone years when she was young, fascinating, and beautiful; and as two tears trickled down her rouged cheeks, she said in a low voice, “Yes—that person who opened you the door and whom you evidently remember—it was I!”

“Well then, I will tell you why I called twice on Lucy Maitland,” hastily continued Ormsby. “The first time was out of sheer curiosity to ascertain whether the tale which she had told on the preceding evening was true: and the second time it was to take her an additional sum of money, for she assured me that if she could only get away from London she should be safe from peril and temptation. I confess that I did not place much reliance on the statement; for I had plunged too deep in dissipation to entertain a wholesome faith in the virtuous resolves of human nature. However, I took her the money; and thenceforth I saw her no more. I became involved in a vortex of exciting incidents—But enough! I am glad to have received from your lips the assurance that my sympathy was not thrown away upon an unworthy object.”

"It was not, sir. Lucy Maitland went away, as she had promised you. I almost fancied it was to place herself under your keeping: I hinted as much to her: but with mingled tears and indignation she repelled the suspicion."

"And she repelled it truthfully!" ejaculated the nobleman. "I swear to you most solemnly that nothing but friendship subsisted between myself and Lucy Maitland on those occasions when I thus saw her. Often and often have I since thought of her!—often and often during the twenty years which have since elapsed have I wondered what had become of her! But I tell you that I had so little faith in human nature that I pictured to myself Lucy Maitland wandering as a depraved creature and as society's forlorn outcast upon the pavement of London, her good resolves having vanished, if indeed they were ever entertained; and I should not have been astonished if I had this night learnt that my evil presages had proved only too accurate. But enough upon this point! Let us hope that she has done well in the world."

There was a pause for a few moments, during which Ormsby thought to himself, "My useful sympathy towards one fellow-creature may have compensated in the eyes of heaven for a long night of cynicism. And now," he said, again addressing the woman before him, "let us proceed to other matters. You are in pecuniary distress. What amount will relieve you?"

The debts of Mrs. Maddox, including the rent due to her landlord, were under sixty pounds; but she thought she might venture upon naming eighty.

"Here are a hundred," said Ormsby; and he counted the bank-notes down on the table. "This sum is yours; and you shall receive a like amount," he added, riveting his large dark eyes earnestly upon her, "on the day which sees the conviction of the villain Timperley for the murder of Mrs. Chicklade!"

"You mean to do this?" said Mrs. Maddox, half frightened.

"Yes—I mean to do it," rejoined the nobleman sternly; "because society demands that so great a crime should be brought home to its true authorship and the criminal himself should be punished! I mean to do it because he suffered an innocent young lady to pass through the terrific ordeal of accusation, arrest, captivity, and trial; and he would have allowed her to go to the scaffold so long as she himself was safe! I will do it because although that young lady was acquitted, yet inasmuch as the deed itself is still involved in the deepest mystery, suspicion may in the minds of some continue to attach itself to her, and her guiltlessness never can be completely proved until the real assassin shall have been unmasked and proclaimed before the whole world. These are the reasons for which I will do it; and you will aid me—not from any moral considerations, but because you shall be liberally rewarded!"

"Tell me what I am to do, sir," said Mrs. Maddox, "and I will obey your commands."

"When do you expect Mr. Timperley?" asked Ormsby.

"I desired him to call upon me this evening or to-morrow evening," rejoined the woman: "I thought he would rather come to such a house as this at those hours when there was the least chance

of his being observed by any one who might chance to know him."

"Well, then," said Ormsby, "if he come this evening, let your servant deny you—let her say that you waited for him, but that as he came not you went out—and let an appointment be made for nine o'clock to-morrow evening. Will you do this?"

"I will, sir," was the reply. "And I suppose that to-morrow evening you will return?"

"To-morrow evening I shall be here at half-past eight o'clock, to give you your lesson how to act."

"Do you think, sir—do you think," asked Mrs. Maddox, "that Mr. Timperley's niece, Mrs. Hardress, was an accomplice in his crime?"

"Assuredly not," replied the nobleman. "I have already acquired the certainty that Mr. Timperley was seen with the wretched woman Chicklade, at about the time when she was so foully murdered."

"But Mrs. Hardress came and purchased the letters of me," interjected Mrs. Maddox.

"There may be two ways of accounting for that circumstance," said the nobleman. "In the first place her uncle may have induced her to visit you for that purpose: he may have either confessed his great guilt unto her—or he may have deluded her by speaking of compromising letters which would tend to fix suspicion on him, though all the time he may have averred his innocence and induced his niece to believe that he was innocent. Or on the other hand, she herself may have had her own reasons for coming to purchase those letters; and by a strange coincidence she may have chanced to find amongst them that very document which so fearfully criminated her uncle. But you yourself ought to be able to say something on this point: you had the letters in your possession—you looked over them——"

"But only in the most cursory manner," interjected Mrs. Maddox. "I glanced at a few—they were chiefly from youths at the University—And yet it certainly has struck me, since I beheld the portrait of Mrs. Hardress last evening and discovered who she was, that the name of *Cicely* occurred in one or two of those letters. But I cannot be sure—my ideas are confused on the subject——"

"It is no matter," said Ormsby: "suspicion does not point to that young lady as the accomplice of her uncle—at least not before the fact. That she subsequently became acquainted with his guilt there can be no doubt. And now I am about to take my departure. Be trusty! Attempt not to deceive me! If you think that by giving Mr. Timperley warning of the storm that is gathering, you may obtain a larger bribe than the reward which I shall give you, you will be in error! Within the hour that is passing a detective officer of justice will be set to watch him day and night—to dog his footsteps—to track all his movements, until circumstances shall be sufficiently combined to justify his arrest!"

The woman promised to maintain the utmost fidelity in the cause which was entrusted to her; and Lord Ormsby quitted the house.

It was no vain threat to which he had given utterance: he lost not a moment in consulting his friend Mr. Stafford, the Government official, who

introduced him to Sergeant Wrichtson of the Detective Force as a fit and proper person to conduct the plans which were now requisite to bring home the crime to Mr. Timperley. Accordingly, the Sergeant set two of his subordinates to work to ferret out whatsoever fresh details they might possibly obtain in the clue which was being followed up; while a third was appointed to keep watch on Mr. Timperley's movements.

At half-past eight o'clock on the ensuing evening, Lord Ormsby and Sergeant Wrichtson called at the house in Norton Street; and they gave Mrs. Maddox full instructions how she was to act when Mr. Timperley should make his appearance. Two rooms separated by folding-doors, presented arrangements by means of which the nobleman and the detective could overhear everything which might take place. At nine o'clock Mr. Timperley knocked at the door of the house; and he was shown into the room where Mrs. Maddox awaited him. It is scarcely necessary to observe that his guilty soul was full of alarm; for he knew full well that this was the house where Mrs. Chicklade had dwelt; and the wording of the landlady's letter had shown him that she considered him to be in her power. She must therefore have discovered something! But that the matter could be settled for money, he had every reason to hope and believe from the private and stealthy way in which he was thus sent for.

Mrs. Maddox faithfully followed out the course which Ormsby and the detective had suggested. She spoke to Mr. Timperley of the letter he had written to Mrs. Chicklade, and in which he had promised the sum of five thousand pounds as the purchase-money of her silence in respect to some discovery she had made materially damaging to his reputation as well as perilous to his personal safety. Mrs. Maddox likewise spoke of the visit of his niece Cicely Neale to procure Mrs. Chicklade's papers; and then she said, "You know, Mr. Timperley, your niece obtained that letter which you penned to the woman; and you gave your niece a dowry of thirty thousand pounds, either as a bribe for her silence, or else as the actual purchase-money for the damnable document!"

"Ah, then Cicely has betrayed me!" ejaculated the lawyer, who was thrown completely off his guard.

"No—she did not intentionally betray you," replied Mrs. Maddox: "but I discovered the secret—it matters not how."

Then Mr. Timperley began to sound Mrs. Maddox as to what her views might be,—though at the same time he endeavoured to impress upon her that he was really innocent of the crime, but that for the sake of avoiding the chance of incurring disagreeable suspicion he had no objection to place the seal of silence upon her lips. He proposed that she should depart forthwith for America—that he would give her five hundred pounds on the day that she set off—and that he would annually remit her one-half of that sum. She gave her consent; and he suggested that she should leave London on the morrow. To this also she agreed; and he took his departure, with the understanding that he should be there at seven o'clock in the morning to see her off.

And at seven o'clock in the morning Ormsby

and the detective were again concealed in the inner room separated from the front one by the folding-doors; and Mr. Timperley was punctual to the appointment. He gave Mrs. Maddox the promised amount; and he said, "I am even dealing with you more liberally than I had undertaken or than you could have expected; for there is a draft upon an American house—one of the principal firms in New York—for a further sum of five hundred pounds, which will be paid to you the instant you arrive in that city."

He accompanied the woman in a cab to Euston Square: he paid her fare to Liverpool—he saw her take her seat in the railway carriage—and he witnessed the departure of the train. His mind was then easy; and he felt convinced there was nothing more to apprehend in that quarter. As for Mrs. Maddox herself, she left the train at some station at no great distance down the line, and on the ensuing night returned to London, where she took a temporary lodging in the suburbs that she might hold herself at the disposal of Sergeant Wrichtson whenever the course of justice should require her presence in the witness-box. The money and the draft upon America which she had received from Mr. Timperley, she surrendered up into the officer's keeping, Lord Ormsby guaranteeing that she should not be a loser by the proceeding.

In the mean time the two detectives who had been set to work to ferret out fresh details, had not been idle. They had communicated with the policemen who discovered the body of Mrs. Chicklade at the time when the murder was committed: they obtained all requisite information from that source; and they procured copies of the depositions taken at the examination of Winifred before the police-magistrate. The incident was then brought back to recollection that Mr. Timperley had actually presented himself at the time in the police-court—that he had voluntarily stood forward to announce himself as the attorney engaged to conduct the accused girl's defence; and this proceeding on his part was now regarded as a mere cloak to shield himself against the possibility of suspicion. Then, too, there was a portion of Mr. Meadowbank the surgeon's evidence, at the time of that examination, which now engaged the serious attention of the detectives; inasmuch as it tended to prove that it was really more consistent to believe that the murder had been committed by the strong hands of a man than by the delicate fingers of a young female. We will quote, for the benefit of the reader, the particular part of the examination to which we now refer, and which was given in the fifteenth chapter of our narrative.

"Do you think," Mr. Wardour, the barrister, had asked of Mr. Meadowbank, "that the hands of the prisoner were those which left their marks upon the neck of the deceased?"

"I should indeed be very sorry to say that they were," was Mr. Meadowbank's answer: "but as an honest man, I am compelled to admit that they might have been."

"You must endeavour, sir," Mr. Wardour had gone on to say, "to give us a positive opinion. I will shape my question in another way. Do you think that those delicate fingers"—pointing towards the prisoner—"could have left upon the



neck of the deceased marks of such a length, width, and depth as you have seen thereupon?"

"There is no doubt," the surgeon had answered, "that the matter is open to the belief that larger hands inflicted those marks. But still it is my duty to observe that discoloration spread rapidly in cases of strangulation by violent throttling; and the original marks are altered, disfigured, and changed thereby, as well as by the swelling which ensues."

"Yet you think, Mr. Meadowbank," the learned counsel had observed, "that it would be more satisfactory for those who wish justice to take its course by emitting the guilty person only, if a prisoner with less delicate hands stood in the dock?"

"I certainly should speak more positively on the point," Mr. Meadowbank had responded.

Our readers may rest assured that the detectives did not fail to see Mr. Meadowbank on the

points to which reference has just been made; and the surgeon unhesitatingly admitted that it would certainly be much more consistent with probability to suppose that a man had committed the murder than that it was the work of a female. In following up their investigations, the detectives succeeded in discovering that Mr. Timperley was up in that very neighbourhood on the day of the murder and at about the hour when it must have been committed; so that the testimony of James Nash the valet was corroborated.

Under all these circumstances Sergeant Wrightson came at length to the conclusion that he should be fully justified in taking the lawyer into custody: but Sir Roderick Dalham requested that this proceeding might stand over until the last moment, in order to afford him an opportunity of obtaining, if possible, the money which Mr. Timperley had so fraudulently kept back from the deceased Sir John's creditors. But, as the reader

has seen, this latter attempt failed; and the pertuscity with which Timperley clung to his illegal gains made the blow which thereupon struck him seem all the more awfully retributive.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FLORENCE AGAIN.

THE scene of our story must be again shifted to the Italian soil; and it is to Florence that we re-conduct the attention of our readers.

Upwards of ten days had elapsed since the memorable incidents which led to the death of Lucrezia di Mirano and to the arrest of her unprincipled paramour the Count di Rembrico: Charles De Vere was still waiting in Florence to see whether the beautiful quadroom would keep her promise and bring her husband to that city: but still they came not. Day after day did he expect them; and he said to himself, "After the immense service which Mrs. Barrington rendered me, by enabling me to perform in safety the journey from her Apennine dwelling into Florence, I am bound to remain here as long as possible to see if I can be of any service to her."

Although his leave of absence from Naples had extended to but a fortnight, and this period had expired, yet the British Ambassador in Florence promised to hold him harmless if he exceeded that furlough by a few days. Thus Charles was still tarrying in the Tuscan capital in the hope of beholding the arrival of the quadroom and her husband: but he was now getting wearied of waiting any longer, and he thought that there was no necessity for him to do so.

Hector Hardress, with his wife and sister, still continued at the hotel in Florence. It was not the same where Charles had taken up his own quarters; neither did he see much of the Hardress family: for he remembered that he had fought a duel with Hector on account of the latter having insulted Agnes--and though they had shaken hands and had subsequently met on friendly terms, yet our hero could not maintain a real intimacy with one whose character he did not respect.

It was a late hour in the evening when a post-chaise drove up to the gate of the hotel at which Charles De Vere was staying. The occupants of the vehicle were the quadroom and her husband. The latter was lying back fast asleep: the former asked from the window whether an English gentleman of the name of De Vere had apartments in that hostelry? The reply was in the affirmative.

"Then," said Emily, "we will stay here also. Have you suitable lodgings?"

The landlord was extremely sorry, but the hotel was quite full: there had been an unusual influx of guests that day--or else nothing would afford him greater pleasure than to accommodate any friend of Mr. De Vere, who was a most worthy and excellent English gentleman. Such was the sense in which the landlord spoke.

"Then what is to be done?" asked Emily. "Is Mr. De Vere in the hotel at this moment?"

"No, signora," was the response. "Signor De Vere dines at the British Embassy. But in respect to apartments, signora, if you will permit me to recommend you to the hotel farther down the street, you will be excellently accommodated."

Emily accepted the arrangement: and she said, "Be so kind as to tell Signor De Vere that Mr. and Mrs. Barrington have arrived, and that we hope to see him to-morrow morning."

"I will not fail, signora," rejoined the landlord. "I know that Signor De Vere has been expecting you for the last ten days or more; for he has been constantly asking if a gentleman and lady by the name of Barrington have arrived. I believe that he himself intended to leave Florence for Naples to-morrow or next day; but I hope your arrival will induce him to stay a little longer."

The equipage now continued its way along the street; and it turned into the court-yard of the hotel to which the recommendation had just been given. Gustavus now woke up: he had slept some hours--he was completely sober; and Emily hastily whispered to him "You are in Florence, dear Gus!"

He smoothed down his hair; and without answering the observation just made by his beautiful quadroom wife, he descended from the chaise, the faithful John having already opened the door, and the waiters coming forth from the establishment to receive the new arrivals. Gustavus did not tarry to offer his arm to assist Emily to alight: but he at once followed a waiter into an apartment to which he led the way.

"The best supper you can put upon the table," said Gustavus, "and plenty of your choicest wine! Bring me a bottle of champagne at once. I am dying with thirst."

The quadroom now entered the apartment; and when the waiter withdrew, she accosted her husband, saying in a low tremulous voice, "Was it kind, Gustavus, to leave me to descend alone from the chaise? was it handsome to put such an indignity upon your own wife in the presence of the assembled servitors of the hotel? was it even acting the part of a gentleman towards a lady?"

"My God, Emily!" ejaculated the young man, stamping his foot with sudden rage; "why do you begin to sermonise me the very moment that I set foot within the walls of this hotel?"

"Forgive me, dear Gustavus," said the quadroom, now adopting the most cajoling and coaxing manner; "forgive me, dear Gus! I will not thus vex you again. But, Oh! you know how I love you, and that therefore I am so jealous of the little attentions which a husband ought to show towards a wife!"

"Pray don't tease me, Emily," said the young man, "with another long story about your love. I am sick of it! Come, come--we will not quarrel!" he ejaculated, as he perceived that the quadroom's luminous black eyes flashed sudden fires: "you know how I hate a scene! Kiss me."

In a moment the splendid dusky-complexioned countenance became animated with joy, and the quadroom literally glued her lips to those of her husband. He suffered the embrace rather than returned it; and as Emily's arms were unwound from about his neck, he threw himself languidly on the sofa. The waiter now entered with a bottle of champagne; and Gustavus drank off two or

three glasses in quick succession, and with all the avidity of one in whom a love of liquor had become an irresistible passion.

Supper was soon served up; and it consisted of all those delicacies and luxuries which are to be found at a first-rate Italian hotel. Emily exerted all her powers to converse in a lively and amusing strain; and she flattered herself that there was a more healthful gaiety about Gustavus than for some time past she had seen.

"By the bye," she presently said, "I forgot to tell you that Mr. De Vere is in Florence, and we shall doubtless see him to-morrow. But this is not the hotel at which he is staying."

"If your Mr. De Vere," replied Gustavus, "is a good fellow, and will bear me company over a bottle of wine, I shall be glad to see him: but if not, he will do well to keep away. He must think me a pretty fellow to have played such pranks the night he was at our house in the Apennines!"

"Do not feel any constraint on that head, my dear Gustavus," rejoined Emily; "for I made a thousand excuses on your behalf. Besides, he is a most generous-hearted young man——"

"Oh, well, I shall know him better when I see him," interrupted Gustavus, who now began to exhibit that petulance and ill-humour which invariably constituted the next phase after the hilarity produced by wine. "I wonder how my poor old grandfather gets on now?"

Emily gave a sudden start; for this was one of the disagreeable topics on which she alike hated and dreaded that her husband should enter; and she exclaimed, "Why speak of him, dear Gustavus? It only fills your mind with sorrowful thoughts!"

"Why speak of him?" ejaculated the young man: "why in the name of heaven should I not? is not this the middle of November? Tell me what is the day of the month——"

"It is the 15th," answered the quadroon: and then suddenly comprehending what was floating in her husband's mind, she hastened to add, "Oh! no doubt your grandfather is happy now. I dare say the Chancery Suit is finished—and of course judgment must have been given in his favour. We knew that he was out of prison—Mr. Millard wrote and told us that much——"

"But poor Winifred! what can have become of Winifred?" exclaimed Gustavus. "Who could have been her seducer?"

"Trouble not yourself about your worthless cousin," interrupted the quadroon fiercely; and her black eyes flashed fire, and her brilliant teeth gleamed betwixt her rich red lips. "I have told you, Gustavus, that I will not have this name mentioned in my hearing. It is an insult to me! If you value my love—that love which has made me sacrifice so much for you—you will henceforth abstain from any allusion to one who set herself up as my rival. For by heaven, Gustavus!"—and the quadroon caught up a sharp pointed knife from the supper-table; "if I thought that there was the slightest lingering impression of Winifred's image on your heart, I would unhesitatingly and remorselessly draw that heart's life blood!"

Gustavus shrank aghast from the words and looks of his wife; and he murmured, "Do not be

afraid, Emily. I will not allude to Winifred any more!"

"Ah, then, you are my own dear Gustavus once again!" cried the quadroon: and flinging down the knife, she sprang towards her husband.

She wound her splendidly modelled arms about his neck—she pressed his head to her swelling bosom—she covered his cheeks and his lips with kisses—she lavished upon him all the tenderest caresses and most fervid endearments. The young man, already half intoxicated with wine, was now completely inebriated by the blandishments of that voluptuous creature; and not merely tolerating her caresses, but now returning them with a kindred ardour, he murmured, "Yes, I love you, Emily! I love you very much!"

It was thus that at one moment by the most terrible threats, and at another by sensuous cajoleries—by menaces at one time, and by caresses at another—by pouring upon him all the fury of her rage, or by enveloping him in the halo of her wantonness,—it was by such strongly contrasting and alternating means as these that Emily retained her empire over Gustavus.

Presently the quadroon rose from the table, and again circling her husband's neck with her glowing arms, and looking upon him with eyes brim-full of desire, she said, "You have now partaken of enough wine, and you stand in need of rest. I am about to withdraw——"

"I will follow you in a few minutes," replied Gustavus, as he glanced towards a bottle which yet remained half filled.

She imprinted a long, burning, devouring kiss upon his lips—flung another deep, impassioned, melting look upon him—and then quitted the apartment. As in all Continental hotels, a suite of rooms communicating one with another had been assigned for the accommodation of Gustavus and his wife; and thus on leaving the sitting-apartment, she had merely to traverse a little ante-room in order to reach the bed-chamber.

When Gustavus was alone, he refilled his glass; and he was about to raise it to his lips, when the landlord entered, and said, "I believe, signor, that your name is Gustavus Barrington?"

"It is so," answered the young man, thinking that the question simply involved some formality in reference to his passport.

"And you have recently come from the village of —— in the Apennines?" continued the landlord.

"Yes: I left it about ten days ago," rejoined Gustavus; "and then, as I was taken ill, I stopped at another little village—I forgot what the deuce was the name of it—but no matter! It is mentioned on the back of the passport, which I suppose my servant gave you——"

"It is not for this, signor, that I have intruded upon you," interrupted the landlord: "but a courier who has travelled from England in search of you, has just arrived at this hotel, and has brought important letters."

"Where are they?" anxiously demanded Gustavus, who was partly sobered by the incident.

"They are here, signor," said the landlord: "but I thought it my duty to assure myself in the first instance that you are the right gentleman—and also to prepare you to receive the tidings of a death——"

"A death?" echoed Gustavus, trembling very much.

"Yes, signor," pursued the master of the establishment; "for the letters indicate that there is mourning in your family——"

"My grandfather!" exclaimed Gustavus; "or else poor Winifred! But quick, quick! give me the letters!"

He clutched the missives which the landlord now proffered him; and instantaneously recognising the handwriting of his cousin on the envelope of one of the letters, he mentally ejaculated, "Thank God! poor Winnie lives! Then it must be my grandfather!"

Another moment, and the suspicion was confirmed. Gustavus burst into tears; and the landlord silently withdrew. But if in one sense the letters were efflicting, yet in other respects they were the messengers of good tidings; for they announced the result of the lawsuit—they revealed the fact that Winifred was no degraded being, but an honourably wedded wife—and they likewise made Gustavus aware that he was the sole heir to the immense wealth just recovered by the judgment of the Chancery Court. It was on the 7th of November that both old Mr. Barrington and Sir John Dalham died; and it was now on the 15th that the intelligence of those events and their associated circumstances reached Gustavus in Florence.

Through what variations of feeling did he now pass! through what transitions of emotion was he hurried! His grandfater was no more; but the lawsuit was won. Winifred was a wife—but O strange! the wife of a Dalham! Yes, and her husband had succeeded to the baronetcy; and Winifred was Lady Dalham! Gustavus had no prejudice against Roderick; and therefore he rejoiced unfeignedly to find that his cousin was not degraded nor disgraced, but that for many long months past she had been a lawfully wedded wife. And now too, Gustavus was rich; and he instantaneously formed the generous purpose of sharing his wealth with Winifred; for her letter told him that her husband Sir Roderick had been disinherited by his own sire.

There were three letters which the courier had brought. One was from Winifred, as we have already stated: the second was from Sir Roderick Dalham to Gustavus, congratulating him upon the accession to his grandfather's wealth, and with manly frankness expressing the hope that they would be good friends. The third letter was from Mr. Millard, the London agent of Mr. Pinnock in Jamaica. It contained the intelligence that by recently received advices from Kingeton, Mr. Pinnock's health was rapidly breaking down, and that therefore Gustavus and Emily were enjoined to return to the West Indies with the least possible delay.

When he had perused the letters, Gustavus poured the contents of his wine-glass down his throat; and as he set it down on the table, he ejaculated with a species of fierce, savage joy, "God be thanked, I am no longer dependent on my wife!—no longer forced to look for every shilling to the purse of Emily's father! By heaven, she shall tyrannise over me no longer! If we are to live together, I will be the master and she shall be the slave!"

Half under the influence of wine as he was, and half under that of the tidings he had received, it was no wonder if his mind should be excited in a particular direction. All the wrongs, real or imaginary, which he had sustained at the hands of the quadroon, flamed up in his recollection; while all the many evidences of her strong and ardent affection sank completely into the background. He longed for revenge—or at least to avail himself of the opportunity to assert his complete independence.

He traversed the ante-room: he entered the bed-chamber. The lamp was burning upon the toilet-table. Emily was in bed; and the dark masses of her luxuriant hair floated over the snowy pillow. Half raising herself so as to support her head with one arm, she bent a look of melting fondness upon her husband; and then she gave a sudden start on perceiving how strange was the expression of his countenance. For a moment she was uncertain what means to adopt—whether those of coercion or entreaty—whether to have recourse to threats or to blandishments. But she quickly determined upon the latter; and bending her luminous eyes with impassioned tenderness upon him, she asked, "What ails you, Gustavus? Is the dark mood returning? If so, believe me—Oh, believe me! it is mere fancy on your part! It is only a delusive imagination which conjures up the spectre that haunts you!"

"Fear nothing on that score," responded Gustavus curtly. "I am neither mad or drunk enough at the present moment to be frightened at spectres. If it had not been for you, I should never have become a sot—and therefore should never have been the made the sport of a wild fantastic delirium!"

"Gustavus—dear Gustavus," cried the quadroon, "what mean these reproaches? Come to my arms, dearest!—let me pillow your head upon my bosom!"

"Listen to me," he interrupted her. "I have just received letters from England."

"Letters?" echoed Emily. "And you have already opened them? You did not wait until you were in my presence?"

"Come, come," he sternly interjected, "no more of your imperiousness! My eyes are opened—if indeed they were ever completely shut; and at all events I am independent. You shall no longer be enabled to let me know and feel that the source of wealth is on your side. In one word, Emily, the suit is gained—my grandfather is dead—and I am his heir."

"Let me condole with you, Gustavus, for the one thing, and rejoice with you for the other," said the quadroon, extending her arms towards him. "What! will you not come to me? why do you speak and look so angry? why do you reproach me? Just now you were all love and affection——"

"Because you rendered me the slave of your cajoleries and your blandishments!" exclaimed Gustavus. "You would not let me talk of Winifred then——"

"Winifred again?" ejaculated the quadroon fiercely. "Even though your grandfather may have left you rich, she is not the less a lost and polluted creature!"

"Silence, Emily—silence!" cried the enraged

Gustavus; "it is your mouth that is polluted with the falsehood you are uttering!"

"Falsehood?" echoed the quadroon, her eyes now flashing forth the fiercest fires. "You dare tell me that I lie, Gustavus? Was not her dishonoured condition visible enough? did we not accuse her of it? did she deny it? was she not overwhelmed with the charge? and was she not called Miss Barrington at her lodgings?"

"Everything is now accounted for!" cried Gustavus. "She was wedded to a Dalham—and she dared not tell the secret! Oh, my God! how we wronged her! Poor girl, poor girl! what must she have suffered!"

The red blood mantled vividly through the transparent duskiness of the quadroon's countenance; and that indignant blush descended on her neck, and even spread over her bosom which was swelling like the billows of a tumultuous sea as she sat up in the couch darting lightning looks upon her husband.

"What! you dare speak of her tenderly in my presence?" she exclaimed: "you are bold enough thus to outrage and insult me?"

"It is you who have outraged and insulted my pure and virtuous cousin!" exclaimed Gustavus fiercely. "Oh! I care not for you now: I defy you! Your looks will not kill; and with those white teeth of yours you dare not bite! I repeat that I defy you! Hear me, then, speak of Winifred! Yes—she whom you despised and scorned, is now a titled lady—she is a baronet's wife—and it is as the honoured and respected—aye, and the beloved Lady Dalham that she must now be spoken of!"

"Beloved?" echoed the quadroon, looking like a panther that was about to spring forth upon its prey.

"Beloved by all who can appreciate virtue and goodness," rejoined Gustavus; and then, after a moment's hesitation, he added, "For any one who loves not Winifred must indeed possess a soul strangely warped by envy, jealousy, or other abhorrent passions."

"Do you mean this for me, Gustavus?" demanded the quadroon.

"If the cap fits you, wear it," he replied with an air of cold scorn and defiance. "But I have other intelligence for you. Your father—as your father you know him to be, since I have told you that he is more than your uncle—your father, I say, is ill—dying—perhaps dead—and you must hasten to Jamaica!"

"Yes—with you," interjected Emily.

"With me?" and Gustavus laughed scornfully. "No, no! I have had enough of your Jamaica!"

"Wretch!" cried the quadroon, her eyes again flashing fire; "is it remorse that renders Jamaica terrible to you?—is it not the scene of the black attempt you made to murder your own wife? Did you not hurl me from the cliffs? Ah! you thought that you had killed me *then*! Yes—and your horrible purpose would have been accomplished, had not the projecting branches broken my fall, and I fell into shallow water!"

"Tis false that I tried to kill you!" vociferated Gustavus, stamping his foot violently. "I pushed you from me because I loathed you!—you reeled to the edge of the precipice—and as God is my judge, I sprang forward to save you! And, Oh!

if we are to bandy accusations, let me enter upon the long catalogue of my charges against you! Think of the document you stole and hid, and which kept my poor grandsire in gaol for months and months when he might have been free. Think of your kidnapping me when I slept, and putting me on board a ship and taking me back to Jamaica! Think of the life you have led me for weeks past! It is you that have made me a drunkard! Oh, you are a terrible woman! Lucifer himself has seemed to look out of your eyes when you have overwhelmed me with threats: but Syrens have given their blandishments to your glances, your smiles, and your toyings, when you have sought to subdue me into a melting sensuousness!"

While Gustavus was thus speaking, the quadroon exhibited the most violent emotions: her entire form writhed and convulsed as if it were that of a panther experiencing some fierce rage ere springing upon its prey: her eyes vibrated like sinister stars—and her fingers kept agitating with a nervous movement, the nails each time making deep indentations into the palms of her hands. All of a sudden—indeed the very moment when Gustavus ceased—she sprang from the couch—not heavily, nor jumping down with a force that shook the room—but lightly and almost noiselessly as if her feet were of velvet; and she confronted her husband.

"Do you mean," she asked, "that there is to be war between us?—for if so, you will have a terrible enemy to deal with, and the love which has been so ferried can only turn into an equal extreme of hatred!"

She had used the word *terrible*; and terrible she certainly looked at that moment. Her large eyes, dark as jet, seemed to be full of a concentrated fire; her brilliant teeth beamed betwixt the parted lips: and the bosom was upheaved with the fierce suspense wherewith she awaited her husband's answer. For a moment he trembled. Intemperance had attenuated his mind too much to permit him to recover its strength all in an instant; and the vaguely horrible idea struck him, to the effect that this woman alike so beautiful and so terrible, was different from other women, and far more potent for mischief. The quadroon observed that quailing on the part of Gustavus; and she experienced a sudden glow of triumph.

"You will not have war," she cried, "because you dare not have it! You know me too well, Gustavus! If you choose to go to England, I will go with you. If you wish me to go to Jamaica, you shall come with me. These are my resolves. And now, if there is to be peace, let us embrace!"

"Peace?" ejaculated Barrington, his mind suddenly regaining its strength: "peace?" he repeated scornfully. "What! when you have just made known your resolves as if you were an empress dictating unto the veriest of your slaves! No, by heaven! there shall not be peace between us unless when you choose to command it! I am your husband—and therefore your master!"

"My master?" cried the quadroon: and never did a more bitter expression of scorn thrill through the tones of a more musical voice. "My master?" she repeated; and her form was drawn

up so that it seemed to dilate before him, and her whole aspect became invested with an unspeakable majesty. But nothing could be more striking nor more marvellous than the rapid change which took place in her,—the fierce fires of scornful indignation suddenly melting into those of love—the lightnings of her eyes subduing themselves into looks of tenderness—the hauteur of her lips losing itself in wreathing smiles—and the bosom beginning to heave and fall with tender emotions, as she said, “Yes, dearest Gustavus! you shall be my master if you will love me as before! Give me back that affection which you bestowed upon me when together we rambled through the plantation in Jamaica—he to me now the same loving, tender, and devoted Gustavus that you were then,—and Oh! I shall rejoice to become your slave!—and then you shall not merely be my master in name—not my master through a miserable fiction only—but you shall be veritably and truly so, because you will be the master of my heart!”

“There was a time, Emily,” answered Gustavus, “when such language as this would have touched me to the very quick and subdued my soul into the most servile submission. But now your appeal produces not the effect which you desire! The spell is broken. I no longer fear you when in your stormiest moment of passion you present to me the terrible Medusa’s head; and I shall no longer be rendered the slave of infatuation when you clothe yourself with the cestus of Venus. And this very night too—nay, this moment—will I show you that henceforth I am determined to be my own master, by leaving you alone to deliberate upon your future conduct, while I go and seek some place of recreation. Farewell until to-morrow.”

With these words Gustavus turned away; and quitting the chamber, he closed the door behind him. He traversed the ante-room—he reached the sitting apartment—and he was on the very point of snatching up his hat, when he heard the door open violently. He turned—and again was he confronted by his wife.

“You shall not leave me thus, Gustavus!” she said, with a look of terrible determination. “Almost naked as I am, I will cling to you—I will hang to you—I will follow you everywhere! I care not how I may bring down ridicule upon us both: but by heaven—”

“By heaven!” repeated Gustavus, “if it come to this, I will take a leaf out of your own book!”—then snatching up a knife from the table, he said, “You are now threatened me with this weapon; and I in my turn now threaten you. Take care of yourself, Emily!—you are dealing with a man whom you have goaded to desperation!”

Scarcely had he thus spoken, when she flew at him like a tigress, and endeavoured to snatch the knife from his grasp. In this attempt she tore his face with her nails; and he, being now rendered infuriate, and under the influence of a rage which had become ungovernable, cried, “By heaven, Emily! I will strike!”

A sudden terror seized upon the quadroon; and breaking away from her husband, she rushed back into the bedchamber. He bounded after her, exclaiming “Now, wretch! I have taught you a lesson!—and as there is a God above us, if you dare molest me more I will immolate you to my rage!”

“Coward!” thrilled from the lips of the quadroon. “Yes—more than coward!—murderer, murderer! you tried to murder me in Jamaica!”

“Repeat not the abhorrent lie!” vociferated Gustavus, who was actually livid with rage.

“Lie? Lie in your teeth!” cried the quadroon.

“Ah, this is too much!”—and the furious young man fastened his grasp upon Emily, at the same time brandishing the knife as if he were about to plunge it deep down into her naked bosom.

“Spare me! do not kill me!” she cried, sinking at his feet.

“No—I would not kill thee!” ejaculated Gustavus; and he tossed the knife from him.

“It was with a sudden cry of triumph that Emily bounded towards it: she caught it up—and then again she sprang at her husband. Down he fell; and she instantaneously placed her foot upon him, at the same time brandishing the weapon over his head, in the same way that he had so lately brandished it over her own. He thought that his last moment was come, so terrible was her appearance, with her dilating form and her eyes flashing fire. He was on his knees; it was now his turn to say, “Spare me! do not kill me!”

“Oh, if in this moment of bitter, bitter provocation,” cried the quadroon, “I can so far control myself—”

But at this instant the door of the room was burst open; and a lady in her night-dress rushed in, exclaiming, “For God’s sake, what is the matter? Would you commit murder?”

Gustavus sprang up to his feet; and the lady, who evidently lacked not courage, bounded forward to snatch away the knife from the hand of the quadroon—who, fearfully annoyed at the scandal produced by the scene, surrendered it up without the slightest resistance or hesitation.

“Good heavens! what is the meaning of this dreadful quarrel?” asked the lady, who in the excitement of the occasion seemed to forget that she was merely in her night-dress in the presence of a stranger of the male sex.

“Let my wife explain it if she think fit!” ejaculated Gustavus: and he hurried out of the chamber.

Snatching up his hat in the outer apartment, he at once sallied forth from the hotel.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CHARLES AND THE QUADROON.

THE quadroon did not make the slightest attempt to retain her husband: she sat down slowly upon a chair by the side of the bed; and her mournful countenance and drooping posture now appeared to indicate that she thought everything was lost.

“Good heavens, how you have frightened me!” said the lady. “I heard the violent altercation—for I occupy the adjoining apartment—my husband has not yet returned from some dinner-party of gentlemen to which he has gone—”

“And who are you, madam?” asked Emily; “for I at least owe you my gratitude for the well-meant purpose which brought you hither.”

"Ah! I was speaking as if you knew me!" cried the lady. "My husband is the Hon. Mr. Hardress, the son of Lord Mendlesham."

"I have heard of him," said the quadroon. "You are the niece of Mr. Timperley; and it was through your intervention that Miss Agnes Evelyn procured a certain document for the liberation of old Mr. Barrington."

"True!" ejaculated Cicely. "And, you therefore, must be the wife of the younger Mr. Barrington?"

"I am that most miserable woman," replied Emily.

"Oh, do not talk in this way!" exclaimed Mrs. Hardress good-naturedly. "All husbands and wives will quarrel now and then."

"Ah! but such a fearful quarrel as this!" ejaculated the quadroon.

"Well, it certainly is not a petty or trivial dispute," said Cicely: "but I daresay that it will be made up to-morrow."

The quadroon shook her head; and then she inquired, "How did you know who I am?"

"Mr. De Vere happened to mention that he was waiting in Florence for young Mr. and Mrs. Barrington," responded Cicely; "and he said that Mrs. Barrington was a West Indian lady; so that I—you will forgive me for adding that I at once suspected who you were."

"Ah! I would that Mr. De Vere could be fetched at once!" ejaculated the quadroon; "for he would advise me how to act. I am afraid I have gone too far! Oh, I am afraid I have gone too far!"

"Do not despond," said Mrs. Hardress. "I will do anything I can to serve you. At the same time you must confess that it was rather an outrageous thing for a wife to stand with a sharp-pointed knife like that over her husband?"

"But you know not the provocation!" said Emily. "Oh, I have loved him so fervently—"

"And perhaps he does not appreciate your love as he ought," interjected Cicely. "Come—tranquillize yourself. We will see what is to be done in the morning."

Mrs. Hardress then took her leave of the quadroon, and glided back to her own chamber without encountering a soul in the passage.

Emily did not for a long time re-enter her couch. She kept waiting and waiting in the hope that Gustavus would return, though at the bottom of her heart there was a deep misgiving that he would not make his appearance again until the morrow. She did indeed feel that she had gone too far, and that presuming too much on the strength of her position, she had proportionately exaggerated the weakness of her husband's—so that the result was that when she arbitrarily refused to relax the cords of discipline with which she had bound him, he gathered together his strength like Samson, and snapping them in twain, threw them off altogether.

Hours passed on—Gustavus returned not—and at length the quadroon lay down upon her couch: but it was a long time ere sleep fell upon her eyes.

When she awoke in the morning, the first idea that struck her was that she had passed through a troubled and terrible dream: but on perceiving that Gustavus was not by her side, she became

aware of the reality of the incidents. Mrs. Hardress presently made her appearance; and on learning that Gustavus had not returned throughout the night, she said, "The affair does really look serious. What can I do for you?"

"A thousand thanks for your kindness!" answered the quadroon. "Would you send at once and fetch Mr. De Vere?"

"Immediately," replied Mrs. Hardress: and she hastened from the quadroon's chamber.

In less than half-an-hour Charles arrived at the hotel. The quadroon had by this time performed her toilet: she was dressed in an elegant morning *deshabillé*; but she looked ill and careworn. As she rose from her seat to welcome our hero, she saw that his countenance wore a serious expression; and she at once ejaculated, "Perhaps you already know what has happened?"

"Yes—I know everything," responded Charles. "Your husband came to me last night—"

"Last night?" ejaculated Emily, almost in an angry tone. "And you did not persuade him to return to me?"

"Mrs. Barrington," answered De Vere, "I said all I could to effect a reconciliation—I used every possible argument—"

"And you failed?" cried the quadroon. "Oh! then he has resolved to abandon me altogether! But it shall not be so!" she ejaculated with a sudden fierce flashing of the eyes. "I will go to him!"

"You know not where to find him, madam," interrupted De Vere. "Oh! it distresses me deeply to be compelled to speak to you on such disagreeable subjects the very instant when we again meet; for I feel that I owe you a deep debt of gratitude—and fain would I have displayed it by showing my readiness to bring you joyous intelligence! But, alas! it is otherwise!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the quadroon, with a frightened look: "have you anything worse to impart?—has anything happened to Gustavus?—has he in a moment of desperation—"

"No, no!" ejaculated Charles: "you have nothing to apprehend on this head. Your husband is far more rational and sane than I could possibly have expected to find him, after all that took place in your house in the Apennines, and after all you told me on that occasion. Indeed, Mrs. Barrington, he is completely rational. No doubt he was very much excited when he came last night to seek me—but still he knew perfectly well what he was saying: and this morning—"

"Ah! you have seen him this morning?" exclaimed Emily. "He must be staying at the same hotel as yourself; and yet you told me just now, Mr. De Vere, that I should not know where to find him!"

"And I told you the truth, Mrs. Barrington," replied Charles. "I myself do not know. Yet I come from him now:—I was on the very point of setting out when Mrs. Hardress' footman came with a message—"

"Oh, Mr. De Vere! what am I to understand?" asked the quadroon: "what does Gustavus mean to do? Will he never return to me?—is everything at an end between us?"

"No, Mrs. Barrington—do not think it," rejoined our hero. "But if you will tranquillize yourself—as you really ought to do—I will explain

as concisely as I can the views and hopes—I may also say the intentions——”

“Ah!” interjected Emily, with bitterness. “Gustavus speaks and acts like a master now! But proceed, Mr. De Vere.”

“Your husband, Mrs. Barrington,” pursued Charles, “entertains no doubt that you love him; but he declares that the tyranny to which your jealousy has subjected him has become intolerable. God knows, Mrs. Barrington, this is an unpleasant duty for me to perform; and I would not have undertaken it if it had not been for the hope of accomplishing it with a degree of delicacy and kindness which may render my intervention more friendly and more useful than if the task were entrusted to a stranger. And therefore, Mrs. Barrington, pardon me if I speak out with plainness.”

“Go on, Mr. De Vere,” said the quodroon, now with a great display of outward calmness. “My husband says that my jealousy constitutes a tyranny that is intolerable. Is it not so? Well then, what remedy does he propose for this excessive love on my part?”

“He says,” resumed Charles De Vere, “that it is now his bounden duty to repair to England and see his cousin Winifred, that he may congratulate her on becoming Lady Dalham, and that he may also shake her husband Sir Roderick Dalham by the hand.”

“Ah! he will go to England?” said Emily. “Well, and what is to prevent me from going to England likewise?”

“But your husband says, my dear madam,” pursued Charles De Vere, “that your uncle is seriously ill in Jamaica—even if he be not already dead; and that it is therefore your duty to set off at once for the West Indies.”

“And what if I refuse?” demanded Emily: “what if I deny my husband’s right to dispose of my proceedings? What if I say that I will go nowhere without my husband?”

“I beseech you to hear reason, Mrs. Barrington,” exclaimed Charles. “Believe me, I feel deeply for you both!”

“Ah! doubtless Gustavus has told you his own tale with a fine gloss upon it!” ejaculated the quodroon bitterly. “But one tale ought to be good until another is told.”

“Oh, my dear madam!” exclaimed Charles, “do not endeavour to make me the judge betwixt man and wife. It is already sufficiently painful for me to act as the means of communication between you——”

“Ah! now I understand why I cannot see Gustavus, and why you do not know where to find him. He means purposely to conceal himself while he negotiates with me; and you are the medium of such negotiation. Is it not so?”

“Putting it in a purely business light, thus it is,” answered Charles.

“And what are the propositions?” inquired the quodroon, with a contemptuous curl of the lip: “what is the nature of this precious negotiation?”

“Ah, madam,” said Charles, “do not treat it lightly or scornfully; for believe me, this is a crisis on which all your happiness depends. Do listen to me patiently, I entreat you! Your husband thinks that a separation for a while will be

beneficial. He will look after his affairs in England: you will proceed to Jamaica. And inasmuch as there must be an interval of six or eight months ere you can meet again, there will be sufficient leisure for you both to deliberate in your own minds how your future demeanour—I mean the demeanour of both of you, is to be mutually exercised. Your husband declares his readiness to make all proper concessions on his own part, where such concessions are due; and on the other hand he hopes that there will be an equally liberal spirit on your side. In short, he thinks that if there be mutual forbearances and generousities—an equal amount of liberality and of humanity on either side—a reciprocal determination to avoid all causes of dispute, and to view everything in its proper light—you may yet meet again to experience a real happiness in the matrimonial state.”

The quodroon listened with fixed look and rigid features to the explanation which our hero gave, and when he had finished speaking, she said, “These are my husband’s propositions. Are they to be viewed in the light of an *ultimatum* to be forced upon me whether I will or not?—or am I to be allowed any discretionary power in accepting, refusing, or modifying them?”

“The explanations I have given,” answered De Vere, “are the expression of your husband’s will. At the same time he knows that he cannot force you to go to Jamaica: but he hopes that your good sense will induce you to agree to this part of the proposition as well as to all the rest. At the same time if you have any suggestion to make——”

“Pray, may I ask,” demanded the quodroon haughtily, “how long a period has been granted me to consider these propositions?”

“Do not think, Mrs. Barrington,” replied Charles, “that your husband is dealing towards you in the imperious and peremptory style of a tyrant. He appeals to your good sense—he appeals likewise to the love which you bear for him——”

“And if I tell you, Mr. De Vere,” interrupted the quodroon, “that I require four-and-twenty hours for reflection?”

“The time will be granted,” exclaimed Charles. “Everything in reason will be accorded to you by your husband. I would not have undertaken this part unless he had faithfully promised me at the outset that his conduct should be characterized by every sentiment of delicacy, forbearance, and kindness towards you.”

“Well then,” said the quodroon, “I require twenty-four hours to reflect upon the propositions that have been made to me. But I will not remain at this hotel! There have been enough scandal and exposure here; and though I have experienced the utmost kindness from Mrs. Harcourt, yet I feel ashamed to look her in the face when we meet. Besides, she has talked of introducing me to her husband and his sister; and I am in no humour for such introductions.”

“Then what do you wish to be done?” inquired Charles. “Command my services in any way.”

“I wish to leave the hotel, I repeat!” resumed Emily. “I will not tarry here another hour! Not that I mean to ask you to take me to the hotel where you yourself are staying—I would



CATRINA PETRORO.

do nothing so indiscreet or inconsiderate! But I would have a lodging taken for me."

"Your wish shall be accomplished," replied Charles. "Within an hour I will send you the address of the house in which I shall have engaged apartments for you."

"And there is our servant Joho," said the quadroon; "I do not want him to remain with me. Let him go with his master. I have my maid—and that is sufficient."

"In all these respects your wishes shall be complied with," said Charles: and he then took his leave.

"And is it come to this?" ejaculated the quadroon, springing up from her seat when the door had closed behind him: "is it come to this, that all the love I have borne for Gustavus is to experience so immense an ingratitude? And am I to be crushed as if I were a worm—trampled

beneath his feet? Ah, he would get back to his cousin Winifred—would he? He loves her still, though she is the wife of another! And who knows but that she may have married for convenience's sake and yet love Gustavus? Oh, the thought is distraction! And he would pack me off to Jamaica! No, no! it shall not be! All my dearest interests are now centred in Europe! I will outwit Gustavus yet. He has doubtless arranged a meeting place with Charles De Vere, that the latter may report what has taken place betwixt him and me. Well then, at the end of the twenty-four hours De Vere will come to me for my decision; and then I must speak evasively in order to gain time—and De Vere will go to the meeting-place again, to report what has occurred. And then I will watch him—I will dog his steps—I will follow him—and Oh! if once again I find myself face to face with Gustavus, I

will cling to him—I will hang to his coat-tails—I will never separate from him—but he shall go to Jamaica with me!"

Such was the plan which the quadroon had settled in her mind; and the better to carry it out she had resolved to leave the hotel and go into a private lodging, where she would be more the mistress of her actions. It was likewise that she should be less constrained that she had desired John to be sent to his master, for fear lest the domestic should act as a spy upon her. De Vere had assented to all these arrangements; and thus everything seemed to be progressing according to the quadroon's wishes.

In an hour Charles returned to her at the hotel.

"I have engaged suitable apartments for your accommodation," he said; "but I thought it would seem discourteous and neglectful if I simply sent you the address and suffered you to proceed thither alone. I have therefore come to be your escort, if you will permit me."

"I presume that you have seen my husband," said Emily: "and that he has requested you to show this attention towards me?"

"Yes," answered Charles frankly: "I have seen Mr. Barrington since I parted from you. He implores that you will listen to the dictates of your reason and your own good sense, and that if you sincerely love him you will consider what is now best for the re-establishment of your mutual happiness."

"And you are still ignorant of his place of abode?" asked the quadroon.

"On my honour as a gentleman I am ignorant of it!" rejoined our hero. "I said to him, 'Do not tell me, Mr. Barrington; because if your wife were to ask me, I should not like to reply in a cold discourteous negative to the question. I would much sooner be placed in a position of utter inability to answer it.'—It was thus that I spoke."

"But you have arranged where to meet him?" said the quadroon inquiringly.

"No such arrangement is as yet made," replied Charles: "but to-morrow I shall receive a note telling me where I may find him at a particular hour. I have now dealt frankly with you, Mrs. Barrington."

"You have," she responded; "and I have no more questions to ask."

A hackney vehicle being obtained, Charles gave his hand to the quadroon to assist her to take her seat in it: he placed himself by her side, and she instructed the driver whither he was to proceed.

"And what about John?" inquired Emily, as the equipage was rolling away from the hotel and she suddenly remembered that she had seen nothing of him at the moment of taking her departure.

"I had already given him instructions according to your wishes," replied Charles: "he is now engaged in packing up his master's effects, and will wait for whatever orders may be presently transmitted to him."

In a few minutes the hackney-coach stopped in front of a neat respectable-looking little house, situated in a street which if not in the most fashionable quarter, was at all events in a very decent neighbourhood; and De Vere said, "It is

in this habitation, Mrs. Barrington, that I have procured you apartments."

There was no carriage-gateway to the house; and the front door now opening, a short middle-aged man, wearing spectacles, made his appearance. Our readers have doubtless already conjectured that this was Signor Petrero: he was accompanied by his sister, a respectable-looking woman of about thirty years of age, and followed by his daughter, whom we previously noticed as a neatly-dressed girl of fifteen or sixteen. The quadroon liked the appearance of these people; and when she was ushered up into the apartments that had been engaged for her, she at once expressed her satisfaction at their comfortable and cleanly aspect.

"Is there anything more that I can do for you at present?" inquired our hero, whose demeanour was most kind, most courteous, and most friendly towards the quadroon.

"Nothing," she responded. "When shall I see you again, Mr. De Vere?"

"You required four-and-twenty hours to reflect upon your husband's propositions," he replied; "and therefore I shall do myself the pleasure of calling to-morrow morning at about this time to receive your decision."

"Be it so, Mr. De Vere," rejoined Emily. "I shall expect you."

Charles then took his leave of the quadroon; and as he descended the stairs he met Petrero's sister,—to whom he said in a low whisper, and with a significant look, "Remember the instructions I have given you!"

She returned that meaning glance, and continued her way to the apartments on the first floor, to ascertain from Emily's maid whether the young lady found everything according to her wishes.

Hours passed—the evening came—and as the dusk began to close in, the quadroon put on a bonnet with a thick veil: she muffled herself up in furs and shawls, for the weather was excessively cold—and moreover it was her object to disguise herself. Telling her maid that she should not be long absent, she descended the stairs and was about to open the front door, when she beheld Signora Petrero, her landlord's sister, sitting in a pensive manner at a table in a little parlour the door of which stood open. On perceiving the new lodger, Signora Petrero rose from her chair, saluted her respectfully, and hastened forward to open the street door.

"You do not seem well, my good woman?" said the quadroon, in a compassionate tone.

"I have a very bad headache," replied Catrina; for such was her Christian name.

"Then I should advise you to retire to rest," said Emily.

"I shall follow your advice, Signora," rejoined the woman.

She then opened the front door for the quadroon to pass out: but scarcely had the latter's feet crossed the threshold, when the Signora Petrero caught up a spacious cloak, in which she muffled herself; and issuing from the house, she was quickly upon the track of her new lodger.

Although the dusk was closing in and a mist was rapidly filling the streets of Florence, yet Signora Petrero continued to keep the quadroon in view, and she presently beheld her enter a gun-

maker's shop. She paused for a few moments: then she passed by the shop—and darting a glance through the window, she saw the gunmaker exhibiting and explaining to the quadroon the movement and action of a beautiful revolver-pistol. Catrina passed on: but soon turning back, she again walked by the shop window; and this time she beheld the quadroon herself holding the pistol in her hand, while the rapid succession of clicking sounds which reached Catrina's ear made her aware that the new lodger was practising the mode of dealing with the pistol according to the explanation she had just received from the gunmaker himself. Catrina dared not hang any longer about the shop, for fear lest she should be observed and her conduct should seem suspicious: she accordingly retreated to a little distance, where from beneath a gateway she kept watch on the quadroon's movements.

In about ten minutes Emily came forth from the gunmaker's shop: then she seemed to hesitate for a moment as to the direction in which she should proceed, or else in reference to the next affair that she might have in hand: but that uncertainty was soon cleared up, for it was now with rapidity that the quadroon continued her way along the street. Catrina still followed at a suitable distance; and at length she saw the quadroon turn into a chemist's shop. Catrina passed the window, which was brilliantly lighted; and at that very moment she saw the chemist who was standing behind the counter, shake his head as if giving a decisive negative to some query that had been put to him or to some request that had been made by Emily. Catrina darted away across the street; and almost immediately afterwards the quadroon came forth from the chemist's. Again she stood with an air of uncertainty close by the threshold: and then it seemed as if she once more made up her mind with a certain degree of abruptness how to act. She sped along the street until another chemist's shop was reached; and this she entered. Signora Petrero suffered a minute or two to elapse; and then she passed by this window as she had done in respect to the others. She now perceived the master of that shop filling a small phial from a large glass bottle; and as Catrina lingered for a few moments, she observed that the chemist said something with a very earnest look to the quadroon. Catrina retreated to the opposite side of the street, where she concealed herself under a gateway until Emily Barrington came forth from the chemist's. Then, as the quadroon began at once to retrace her steps without any appearance of deliberation, hesitation, or uncertainty, Catrina felt assured that her purchases were all made and that she was bending her way homeward. Darting down a by-street, Catrina soon reached her brother's dwelling.

When the quadroon returned to the house, the front door was opened by Petrero's daughter: but Catrina was seen seated in the little parlour, with a kerchief tied over her head, which was supported by her arm, as if she were still ill and suffering.

"What!" ejaculated the quadroon; "have you not taken my advice and retired to rest?"

"I thank you, signora, for your kind sympathy," responded Catrina; "but I really have not had courage to move from my seat since you left the house—I mean that I feel so faint and ill. I

was asking just now if my niece had got a little perfume——"

"I have plenty up-stairs," ejaculated Emily. "Come with me, my girl, and I will give you some for your aunt."

The young maiden followed the quadroon up to the apartments on the first floor; and Emily said, "Wait one moment, my girl, while I put away these purchases that I have been making."

"Pray do not hurry yourself, signora," said Petrero's daughter.

The quadroon opened a bureau in her bed-chamber; and she deposited on a shelf the purchases she had been making—one being a somewhat large parcel, at least for a lady to carry—and the other a very small one. She locked the bureau, and secured the key about her person. She then opened an elegant dressing-case which she possessed; and taking forth a bottle, she exclaimed, "Here, my girl, give this perfume to your aunt, and bid her bathe her head with it. I shall be much mistaken if it do not benefit her."

The bed-chamber opened from the sitting-room; and the young maiden now advanced from the threshold where she had been standing; and taking the bottle of perfume, she expressed her thanks for Mrs. Barrington's kindness. Descending the stairs, she sought the parlour where she had left her aunt, who now no longer looked liked one that had a headache, but she was all eager curiosity to receive some information which she seemed to expect.

"There are two parcels, aunt," whispered the niece, with a significant look. "One is a tolerably large one, and seemed heavy——"

"Ah! this was from the gunsmith's. Well, and the other?"

"A very small one indeed—nestly enveloped in blue paper——"

"The one from the chemist's!" interjected the aunt. "It is as I thought. What else, my dear girl?"

"The lady has put them away very carefully in the bureau in her bed-chamber," rejoined the maiden; "and she has secured the key about her person."

"Good, my dear girl!" said Catrina, tapping her pretty niece caressingly on the cheek; and then she mentally added, "Fortunately there are two keys to that bureau, and I have got one of them!"

Again did Catrina muffle herself in the cloak; and again did she sally forth. She was not more than about half-an-hour absent; but when she returned, she also had two parcels in her possession,—one being somewhat large and heavy, and the other a very small one neatly enveloped in blue paper.

On the following day, at about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, Charles De Vere called at Petrero's house; and after having had some little conversation with Catrina, he ascended to the sitting room on the first floor. He found the quadroon seated upon the sofa in an elegant morning *deshabille*; and the masses of her dark hair were flowing all negligently over her shoulders. She did not rise as he entered: but she extended her hand—and in a languid tone, she said, "So you have come, Mr. De Vere: you have come to hear my decision?"

But I cannot possibly give it to you—I have been so ill—so desponding, and so wretched——”

Charles flung a singularly piercing glance upon her for a moment: and then he said, “But surely, Mrs. Barrington, you must feel that for many reasons this is a matter which cannot possibly admit of delay. For both your sakes—for your own and for your husband’s——”

“I know how important it is,” interjected the quadroom; “but you really must have patience with me, Mr. De Vere: for my mind has been so perplexed and unsettled—my thoughts have been so distracted—that I could not fix them upon anything.”

“What, then, would you wish to be done?” inquired our hero. “Do you seek for a further delay. If so, I beseech you to let it be a very short one, because it really is necessary that your husband should proceed to England——”

“Oh, Mr. De Vere!” exclaimed Emily, “I beseech you to procure me another twenty-four hours to reflect upon this most momentous subject! Oh, do, Mr. De Vere! I beseech and implore you!”

As Charles appeared to hesitate what answer he should give, the quadroom seized him by the hand, and looked up entreatingly into his face, thus artfully endeavouring to envelope him with all the spell-like power of her eyes. At that very instant the door opened, and Petrora’s niece appeared upon the threshold. Charles De Vere started back from the quadroom: indeed he was in the very act of thus retreating from her at the instant; and it was therefore with a certain degree of abruptness he tore his hand away from her. She herself was covered with confusion; because she had really intended no improper overture towards him: all her thoughts were too completely centred in Gustavus to permit her to entertain any illicit inclination towards another. It was an artful esjology which she had at the instant attempted to practise—and nothing more.

Petrora’s niece seemed to feel that she was an intruder; and she stood hesitating upon the threshold. Charles, at once recovering his self-possession, exclaimed, “Come in, signoretta. What message or business have you?”

“Merely to present this little bouquet which my father has sent up to place on the signora’s table.”

“Thank your father on my behalf,” said the quadroom: and the girl, having acquitted herself of her errand, beat a rapid retreat.

“Mrs. Barrington,” said Charles, in a somewhat severe tone, “you suffer your feelings to hurry you away in a manner which might seriously compromise you——”

“Mr. De Vere,” she answered, with the crimson mantling richly through the duskiest of her complexion, “I know that I merit this reproach. Pardon me, sir—and forget what happened! Looking upon you as a friend, I assuredly displayed too much feeling when entreating that there may be a delay of twenty-four hours ere I decide upon my husband’s propositions.”

“There shall be this delay, Mrs. Barrington,” rejoined Charles. “I take it upon myself to enter into the arrangement with you. To-morrow, at the same hour, I will call again—unless indeed it be necessary for any reason that I should see you in the interval.”

Having thus spoken, Charles took his leave of the quadroom, and at once issued from the house. Scarcely had the door of the apartment closed behind him—and even while his feet were yet descending the staircase—Emily sprang up from the sofa and rushed into the bed-chamber. Her long raven tresses were gathered up in a moment—the *deskabilles* was cast off—and the dress, which her maid held in readiness, was at once put on. Then the thick black veil was folded closely over Emily’s countenance; and she glided down the staircase—so that she issued forth from the house within two minutes after the front door had closed behind our hero.

But matters will appear to the reader as if they were becoming more and more complicated; for no sooner had the quadroom thus rushed forth when Catrina Petrora, quickly muffling herself in her cloak, was upon her track.

Emily soon caught sight of Charles as he was proceeding along the street: but she kept at such a distance as to avoid the chance of being noticed. Every now and then she saw our hero look cautiously round; and at those instants she was careful to keep behind the passengers in the street, or else to step under a gateway: but she, on her own part, little suspected that while she was thus skilfully endeavouring to evade the notice of De Vere, all her own movements were being watched by Catrina Petrora!

Some minutes had elapsed while this double game of tracking and watching was in progress, when Catrina hastily darted down a by-street; and by speeding along several narrow windings, she presently gained the extremity of the thoroughfare which Charles was still pursuing; for the circuitous route taken by Catrina brought her to that point. Thus at the very moment when Charles emerged from that thoroughfare into the square to which it led, a voice whispered rapidly in his ear, “Beware! She is following you!”

Then the cloaked female who had given this warning, and whom Charles knew to be Catrina Petrora, darted away in another direction. Our hero—who was really on his way to meet Gustavus Barrington at a place in the immediate neighbourhood—now altered his plan of proceedings; and leisurely crossing the square, he entered a news-room. There he waited away a couple of hours; and thence he repaired to the British Embassy, to pay his respects to the Ambassador. From the Embassy he went to his hotel; and there he found a note waiting for him which had just been delivered by Catrina Petrora, to the effect that the quadroom was still watching and following him.

“She is indefatigable!” thought Charles to himself: “yes—as persevering as she is cunning and artful! But she must be baffled! At all events her husband will not fail to conjecture the reason why I do not keep my appointment with him.”

Our hero’s musings were interrupted by the entrance of a waiter, who handed him a note which had just arrived. The address was in a beautiful female hand, but totally unknown to De Vere. On opening it, he found it came from the Hon. Mrs. Hardress,—who, presenting her compliments in the due form of courtesy, requested that Mr. De Vere would favour her with a call at

his leisure in the course of the day. Having nothing better to do at the moment, and not daring to seek Gustavus at the place of appointment, Charles put on his hat and bent his steps towards the hotel where the Hardress family were staying. As he emerged into the street, he flung his looks around to see if he could catch a glimpse of the quadroom: but the thoroughfares were now tolerably crowded, and he discerned her not amongst the passengers who were proceeding hither and thither.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CICELY AND CHARLES.

IN order to explain the purpose for which Cicely had written to desire that Charles De Vere would favour her with a call, we must record a conversation that took place between herself and her husband in the morning of the same day whereof we are writing. It was after breakfast: Josephine Hardress had retired to her own chamber: Hector and Cicely were alone together. The young patrician hummed a tune—threw himself back in his chair—stretched out his legs and arms—then suddenly starting up, walked to fro in the apartment for nearly a minute—and ultimately throwing himself upon a seat in the window-recess, he became absorbed in deep thought.

Cicely watched him without appearing to do so. She held a book in her hand; and her eyes seemed to be fixed upon it—but in reality her regards were wandering from beneath the long lashes towards her husband. At length rising from her chair, she advanced straight up to him, and laid her hand upon his shoulder. He started as if awakened from a dream; and it was almost with petulance that he ejaculated, "How you frighten me, Cicely!"

"And what a singular mood you must be in, Hector," she replied, "to be startled by so simple an action! Come now, tell me what is uppermost in your thoughts?"

"I was not aware, Cicely," answered her husband, somewhat coldly, "that there was so much loving confidence subsisting between us as to give you the right to inquire the subject of my thoughts."

"Neither did I assert the right," said Cicely, arming herself with a still haughtier coldness than that which her husband had just put on. "But inasmuch as it is quite probable I can guess what is passing in your mind——"

"Indeed?" ejaculated Hector, as if the discourse suddenly became invested with a certain degree of interest. "What do you mean?"

"I mean precisely what I say," rejoined Cicely, with a smile that displayed her magnificent teeth. "You are thinking of some one——"

"Ah!" cried Hector, starting up from his seat: "what penetration you must have! But yet I do not know that it needs so very much penetration, after all, to discover these sorts of things. I think it is merely catching up with boldness, as it were, the first passing conjecture which strikes one,—assuming it at once to be a fact, and asserting it as such with bardihood and dogmatic emphasis."

"What do you mean, Hector, with this cloud of verbiage?" inquired Cicely.

"I will soon explain myself," responded her husband. "You think you have made some discovery in respect to me?"

"Yes—I am sure of it," answered Cicely, with confidence. "What then?"

"I think I have made some discovery in reference to you," replied Hector, assuming an equal degree of confidence in his look and tone: and then, as he beheld a slight flush sit over his wife's countenance, he added still more emphatically and positively, "I have no doubt of it!"

"Tell me what you mean," said Cicely; and there was a half-smile upon her lips, while the blush was again fitting over her cheeks.

"Do you explain yourself first," said Hardress; and then he also smiled in an encouraging manner. "Come, our explanations are about to be interesting. Speak, Cicely."

"There is a certain image," replied Mrs. Hardress, "which is uppermost in your mind. I am neither so vain nor so foolish as to mean that it is my image. It is the image of one far more beautiful than I. She disappeared suddenly; and ever since her abrupt departure, you have been restless, unsettled, and uneasy. A fortnight has now elapsed since that departure; and you have been incessantly haunted by the image of the lost one. I mean Floribel Lister."

Cicely's large blue eyes were fixed steadfastly upon her husband as she thus spoke; and the expression of a sly significance, good-humouredly mischievous and full of meaning, played upon the rich fulness of her lips; for she saw by Hector's countenance that her suspicions and conjectures were most accurate.

"And now before I give you any answer, Cicely," he said,—“before I tell you whether you are right or wrong—before I proclaim any denial or proffer any confession—let me accuse you in my turn."

Again the blush swept across Cicely's countenance—but deeper in its hue than before; and with a smile and look of roguish ardhness, she said, "Proceed, Hector—and let us see to what extent your skill goes in forming conjectures."

"I am not the only one," answered her husband, "who is haunted by images: *you* are haunted by a special image likewise! I know that you have been struck by a particular individual—and the one to whom I allude is Charles De Vere!"

"Well," said Cicely, with a deepening blush, "but what about the charge I brought against you?—what about Floribel Lister?"

"I have certainly conceived a fancy in that direction," he answered. "But you, Cicely—in reference to Charles De Vere——"

"He is doubtless a very fascinating young man," replied Mrs. Hardress; "and if any one could possibly lead me astray, it would be Charles De Vere."

"Now our confessions are mutual," said Hardress. "Have you anything to propose?"

"I do not know," resumed Cicely, "how your feelings of jealousy——"

"Ah! I understand to what you allude!" exclaimed Hector. "You think that because I was so terribly fierce and vindictive when I thought

that Theodore Clifford was your lover—your paramour—”

“You remember how you burst into the chamber with a brace of pistols in your hands?” cried Cicely.

“Ah! but knowing he was the seducer of my sister,” rejoined Hector, “I was goaded to madness by the thought that he had seduced my wife also! Let that pass—and let us speak no more of it. I am not jealous as an ordinary rule: or, at all events, I need not be if you are going to enter into an arrangement that we will allow each other leave and license for mutually following our caprices—”

“Enough! we understand each other!” ejaculated Cicely. “Go and seek Floribel Lister. I know that is what you wish to do.”

“It is. And you, on the other hand,” said Hector, “may prepare your batteries of wiles and blandishments for Charles De Vere. But recollect, Cicely, he has the credit of being what is called a very good, steady, prudent young man. Not that I have any faith in a young man’s virtue—”

“This is a point which we will not discuss,” interjected Cicely. “Suffice it to say that I am vain enough to hope and believe that Charles De Vere is not quite so much of an anchorite or a saint—”

“As to resist the blandishments of a good-looking woman?” exclaimed Hardress. “No! you are right, Cicely! But Ah! is there not one consideration which will have its weight with you. Charles De Vere is engaged, as rumour says, to Agnes Evelyn—and Agnes is a great friend of yours—”

“Oh, but friendship in such matters goes for nothing! Agnes will never hear of it. It is but a passing caprice; and therefore when De Vere shall have become the husband of Agnes, there will be no pretensions nor claims on my part to trouble his mind or to break in upon their matrimonial happiness.”

“Ah! did not Floribel beg and entreat you, Cicely,” inquired Hardress, “that you would never mention to Agnes that she was identical with that Ciprina who, as the associate of the Marchioness di Miraco, had not improved her reputation?”

“Yes—Floribel made that request,” responded Cicely, “and as a matter of course it shall be fulfilled.”

“One word more!” cried Hector. “You and I need not suffer Josephine to know anything about the pleasant little compact into which we have both entered.”

“Assuredly not!” answered Cicely. “And now go and ascertain, if possible, which direction Floribel took when she quitted the Tuscan capital. You will have to be minute in your inquiries—yes, and persevering too—inasmuch as it is now a fortnight since she left—”

“Believe me, Cicely,” interrupted Hardress, “that I shall leave no stone unturned in order to get upon the track of the fugitive!”

Having thus spoken, Hector Hardress quitted the room; and Cicely sat down to pen a note to Charles De Vere. When she had despatched it, she reflected upon the manner in which she should receive him—the toilet that she should wear—and the method in which she should open the batteries of her charms and wiles. At length she deter-

mined upon appearing in her morning *negligée*—the dress that was most undress, and afforded the greatest scope for all those little artful coquetries by which a woman appeals to the passions of one who she wishes to enslave. She looked at herself in the glass; and never had her beautiful complexion appeared more transparent. The morning wrapper that she wore not merely defined all her contours, but might be readily made to afford a glimpse of the glowing charms as if by some accidental movement or gesture on her part. Then, if she threw herself with a lounging air of self-abandonment into a large arm-chair, she might readily display the well-rounded ankles and the long narrow shapely feet upon the elegantly worked ottoman. As for the expression of her eyes, they became full of a sensuous languor as she thought of the handsome Charles De Vere.

It was easy for her to make Josephine Hardress comprehend that she wished to be alone presently with Mr. De Vere when he should be announced; for she alleged as an excuse that she wished to speak seriously to him relative to Mrs. Barrington, who had departed so abruptly from the hotel in the forenoon of the preceding day. Josephine—though by no means inexperienced, nor wanting in penetration—nevertheless readily gave her sister-in-law credit for sincerity in the matter; and she therefore kept to her own apartment.

It was about two o’clock in the afternoon when our hero reached the hotel in obedience to Cicely’s summons. He inquired for Mrs. Hardress, and was at once conducted up to the room where she waited to receive him. He beheld her lying back in the great arm-chair with her feet upon the ottoman—dressed in the gauzy *moulin deshabille*—and with a certain languor in her look, which gave her the air as if she had just awakened up from some soft voluptuous dream. Yet not for an instant did Charles conceive that all this was artfully studied and provocative towards himself: he fancied that though he had been sent for, yet that his arrival at that moment was unexpected. Biting with his customary politeness, he said, “I received your note, Mrs. Hardress; and I hastened to obey the summons.”

Without rising from her seat, Cicely gave him her hand; and for a moment it struck Charles there was a slight pressure—something more than was usually associated with the grasp of mere acquaintances; but the next instant the idea vanished from his brain.

“Sit down, Mr. De Vere,” said Cicely, indicating a chair that was near her own; “for I have several topics to talk to you about. That dusky-complexioned lady, Mrs. Barrington—what have you done with her? She certainly behaved very rudely to me after all the trouble I took—”

“She was in haste to get away from the hotel,” replied Charles. “The truth is, Mrs. Hardress, she was ashamed of meeting you after such an exposure.”

“And what was the quarrel all about?” inquired Cicely; “for the quadroon-lady entered into no explanations with me, and of course I asked her for none. At all events, Mr. De Vere,” added Cicely, with a sly look, “she seemed very anxious to have you sent for as soon as possible!”

“It is a most unfortunate affair,” said Charles, with an air of vexation.

"Doubtless," interjected Mrs. Hardress, "jealousy is at the bottom of it?"

"Yes—to a very great extent," rejoined Charles; and then, as he mused over the complications which had arisen, he said in a kind of abstracted manner, "And to think that I should have got myself involved in this way!"

Cicely gave a slight start, as she mentally ejaculated, "Oh! ho! I have discovered the entire truth now! Jealousy indeed! And of whom should Mr. Barrington have been jealous but of Charles De Vere? Ah, Charles is no saint after all! But he is handsome enough for me to win as a lover for the moment, although he may possibly prefer his ducky-complexioned mistress the quadron! Good heavens, what a world it is! While poor Agnes flatters herself that her lover is the very paragon of fidelity and rectitude and virtue, he is in reality just as bad as other men!"

All these thoughts flitted through Cicely's brain far more rapidly than we could possibly place them on record; and then turning towards Charles, she said, with a smile that revealed her brilliant teeth, "I think, Mr. De Vere, that the blame of all frailties and peccadilloes in the world ought not to be thrown upon us poor women; but that you men ought to take your fair share."

Charles naturally thought that Mrs. Hardress meant to express a belief that Gustavus Barrington had given his wife cause for jealousy; and so he simply said, with a laugh, "The ladies of course cannot think that they are wholly and solely in the wrong."

"No—not when men are handsome, and fascinating, and endowed with every quality to win poor women's hearts!"—and here Cicely bent so peculiar a look upon Charles that a suspicion for an instant flashed to his brain.

"This affair of the Barringtons is indeed a most unpleasant one," he said, immediately banishing that suspicion. "I wish that I had never anything to do with it, and that I was fairly out of it!"

"Ah!" said Cicely, who thought that this was intended as a compliment to herself, and that it was as much as to imply how far happier Charles would feel if engaged in an affair of gallantry with her rather than with the quadron: "we poor women cannot always tell when you gentlemen are sincere. I often think that the younger you are, the more artful you are likely to be. Besides, talk of the inconstancy of our sex!—what is it in comparison with that of your's? Nevertheless, my dear Mr. De Vere," continued Cicely, bending upon him another long lingering look of sensuousness, and suffering a portion of her muslin wrapper to be disordered at her bosom, so that her eyes were full of encouragement and overtone while her appearance was most voluptuously provocative—"nevertheless, my dear Mr. De Vere, I am fully disposed to believe you; and if you tell me the tale which I know those lips are as ready to breathe as my ears are to drink it in——"

"Mrs. Hardress!" ejaculated our hero, bewildered almost to stupefaction.

"Oh!" she continued, "you are surprised that the impression should be mutual, and that it should be for me to give you all this encouragement. But Oh, Charles! from the very moment I first saw you in England I felt that I liked you!—

marriage with another has not effaced the impression—and now that we meet again in a foreign country——"

"Good heavens, Mrs. Hardress!" cried our hero; "such language as this——"

"Oh, do not think me too bold!" interrupted Cicely; and snatching our hero's hand in both her own, she pressed it to her lips and to her bosom before he could possibly snatch it away.

"Mrs. Hardress," he said, her conduct now utterly unmistakable, "is it possible that by any look, word, or deed on my part you could possibly have so completely misunderstood me?"

"What!" she cried, her countenance suddenly becoming crimson: "misunderstood me?"

"Yes, madam," replied our hero coldly and sternly; "completely misunderstood me."

"Ah!"—and those eyes which were usually so soft in their expression, suddenly flashed forth sinister fire—their countenance became ghastly with rage—the rich hue fled from the full pouting lips, leaving them livid white—and at that moment she looked just as she appeared when we described her to the reader on the occasion when she stood before Mrs. Chicklade in the lane, with the darkest thoughts passing in her mind. But all in an instant the colour rushed again to her cheeks—they became crimson—the scarlet hue spread over her neck and her bosom—and her white teeth gleamed betwixt the rich carnation of her lips, as she experienced all the uttermost shame and humiliation following as a natural revulsion from the phase of rage and fury.

"Mrs. Hardress," said Charles, in a cold severe tone, "deeply, deeply should I be afflicted if I thought that through any levity on my part you had been led into this fatal error. But I can place my hand on my heart, and with a clear conscience rejoice in my own self-acquittal. I take my leave of you, madam, sorrowful that one whom I always hitherto respected——"

"Oh, hypocrite! vile hypocrite!" ejaculated Cicely; "how dare you address me in terms such as these? Say that you cannot love me—say that you cannot even like me—say that your fancy leads you not in this direction!—yes, insult my vanity if you will—insult my pride!—but insult not my understanding!"

"You are evidently labouring under some strange mistake, madam, with regard to me," replied Charles; "but I shall not condescend to vindicate myself any further."

With these words he bowed with a cold haughty dignity; and he was about to leave the room when Cicely sprang forward, and catching him by the wrist, said in a low hoarse voice, "At all events, Mr. De Vere, you will not expose me—you will not render me the subject of ridicule?—you will not let me be pointed at by your friends and acquaintances?"

"Madam," answered our hero, "the humiliation which you now experience is a sufficient punishment. In reference to this scene the seal of silence shall rest upon my lips. But there is one thing that I stipulate; and this is that you neither associate nor correspond with Agnes Evelyn henceforth."

Cicely turned away from him without giving any reply; and when the door closed behind him, she threw herself upon the sofa and buried her face

in the cushion; and she there stifled sobs—aye, and even cries that if not thus subdued, would have been heard throughout the building. Never was woman so mortified! never was a rebuff so deeply, keenly, poignantly felt! But all of a sudden she started up—she dashed away her tears—and she murmured to herself, “I must be revenged!—yes, by some means I must be revenged upon that young profligate who keeps all his sensual love for the quadroom!”

Five or six days passed, during which interval Cicely beheld nothing more of Charles De Vere; and Hector had left Florence upon some clue, real or imaginary, which he had obtained to the destination taken by Floribel Lister when she quitted the Tuscan capital. One day—to be particular as to date, it was on the 22nd of November—Cicely was seated alone in the apartment where her terrible humiliation had taken place, when a domestic entered announcing that a gentleman from England desired an interview with her.

“A gentleman from England?” ejaculated Cicely. “Who can he be? Let him be shown up.”

In a few minutes a tall distinguished-looking man—dressed in black, with piercing dark eyes, and hair that was turning grey, though he had a remarkably fine set of teeth, and in other respects looked younger than those premature snows upon the head might seem to indicate—entered the apartment. Cicely rose to receive him; and he, at once recognising her by the portrait he had seen in London at the house of Mrs. Maddox in Norton Street, said, “I know that I have the honour of speaking to Mrs. Hardress. Permit me to announce myself as Mr. Hargrave.”

“Ah, I have heard of you, Mr. Hargrave!” ejaculated Cicely. “You brought from Jamaica a certain document which had found its way thither, and which I in the first instance procured from my uncle Mr. Timperley. My friend Miss Evelyn told me how you arrived in England and gave the document to Winifred Barrington.”

“I have brought you a letter from Miss Evelyn,” said Lord Ormsby. “Here it is.”

“Ah! a letter from my dear friend Agnes?” cried Cicely, breaking the seal. “And it is dated the 14th instant. Ah! it seems, then, Mr. Hargrave, that you are a very old friend of Agnes—deeply interested in her welfare—and as much attached to her as if you were her own father. Oh! no wonder! It is impossible not to love Agnes! And so I perceive also by this letter, that M. Marcellin and Signor Paoli have arrived in England—”

“Yes—upon the very same day on which that letter was written,” responded Lord Ormsby; and then it was with a considerable degree of anxiety that he watched Cicely’s countenance, for he knew what would next follow in the letter which she held in her hand.

“Good heavens!” she cried, “what does Agnes mean? I am to prepare myself for a terrible revelation!—a revelation of something which occurred on the very day on which she penned this communication—the 14th instant! Oh, Mr. Hargrave! what is it? what is it?”

“Your uncle Mr. Timperley,” replied Lord Ormsby, “was on that day arrested—Prepare yourself—nerve yourself—no doubt you can

conjecture for what he was so arrested, Mrs. Hardress?”

“My God!” she said, becoming as pale as death: “has *that* been brought to light at last?”

“Yes—it is so,” responded Lord Ormsby; “and I do not hesitate to tell you, Mrs. Hardress, that I have taken some share in those proceedings which have resulted in bringing your uncle to justice!”

“You, sir? And why *you*, sir?” demanded Cicely, with a sudden sinister flashing of her eyes. “Why should you have done this?”

“Because,” replied Ormsby, “it was a duty that I owed to society—and a duty likewise which was owed to that poor Winifred whom your wretched uncle suffered to be arrested, tried—aye, and would have suffered likewise to be hanged for the crime which he himself committed! And you too, Mrs. Hardress, have not played a very fine part towards poor Winifred; for you have long been conversant with the fact that your uncle was the true criminal—and yet you have never raised your voice to proclaim it!”

“Tell me, Mr. Hargrave—tell me,” said Cicely, in an agitated manner, “will any harm accrue to me?”

“You knew of a murder, Mrs. Hardress,” replied Ormsby, “—you knew who the murderer was—and you shielded him! It is almost like becoming an accessory after the fact—”

“He was my uncle, Mr. Hargrave!” exclaimed Cicely.

“Yes: and say also,” rejoined the nobleman, “that he purchased your silence for thirty thousand pounds! The world, Mrs. Hardress, will form its opinion upon your conduct; but I do not know that the law itself will meddle with you. The man was your uncle, as you say; and that consideration will have its weight—for it is natural to screen a relative. For my own part, Mrs. Hardress, I came to break to you the intelligence of this awful bursting of the storm above the head of your uncle: I have travelled day and night from England to be the bearer of the intelligence, so that it should be communicated delicately—and with due preparation,” he added, pointing to Agnes’ letter. “Because I am not unmindful of your generous intervention in procuring the document from your uncle on behalf of poor old Mr. Barrington—”

“Alas, Mr. Hargrave!” said Cicely, “it was indeed my duty to do something for the Barrington family after having held my peace and kept the seal of silence on my lips when on the other hand it was my bounden duty to proclaim the innocence of Winifred! But good heavens! my uncle arrested on that terrible charge! And my poor aunt?”

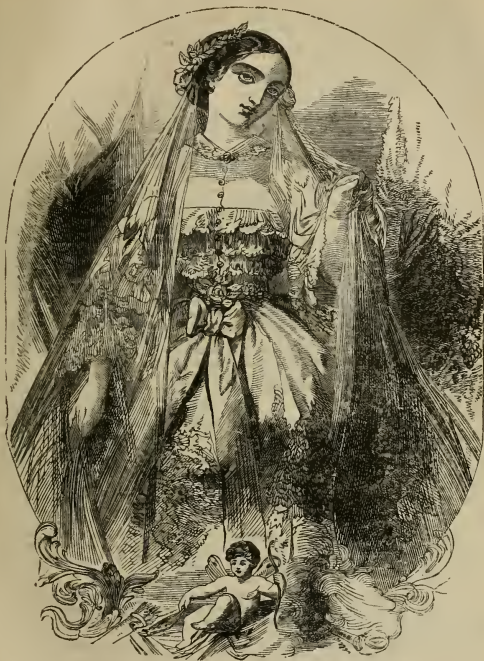
“I know not how she has taken it,” replied Ormsby. “I left London on the evening of the 14th, the day on which your uncle was arrested.”

“And the chain of evidence?” inquired Cicely.

“Most providentially worked out!” answered Ormsby; “and by no means unconnected with your visit, Mrs. Hardress, when you were still Miss Neale, to Mrs. Maddox in Norton Street to purchase Mrs. Chicklade’s letters.”

“Ah!” cried Cicely, turning pale. “Good heavens! has any inadvertence on my part—”

“By the account which I have heard, Mrs.



Hardress," rejoined Ormsby, "you took every possible precaution on that memorable night to conceal your identity from Mrs. Maddox. But nevertheless she discovered it after a time; and the consequence is the arrest of your uncle as the murderer of Mrs. Chicklade. Your evidence will not be required—you can add no material link to the chain that has been already wrought as if by the hand of Providence itself!"

—Lord Ormsby then gave Cicely certain explanations in connexion with the various circumstances that led to the bringing of her uncle to justice.

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"I do indeed see," she said, "that there is naught which I can add to render the evidence more conclusive—though there is *something* I may tell you to make it more complete. And as I cannot possibly prejudice a cause which is so utterly without a hope, I will fill up the slight gap which exists. Indeed, I will do it for my own sake, Mr. Hardress—to prove that I at all events am completely innocent of any complicity in that dark crime!"

Cicely paused for a few moments; and then she continued in the following manner:—

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"You have alluded to an incident that materially concerns myself: I mean my visit to the house of Mrs. Maddox to purchase Mrs. Chicklade's letters. It is true that I did so. Certain letters from Hector to Mrs. Chicklade were in existence,—letters which compromised me! I need say no more on this point: you understand me, sir! Well then, it was vitally important to me to procure those letters; and I purchased them accordingly."

"And amongst them," interjected Mr. Hargrave, "was one from Mr. Timperley to Mrs. Chicklade."

"I will explain the point," resumed Cicely. "I met Mrs. Chicklade but a short time before she was killed. She demanded money of me; and one Sunday, when the greater portion of the household were at church, I admitted her into the house in Lincoln's Inn Fields. I took her into my uncle's private office: I went up to my own room to fetch my purse—and the circumstance of a housemaid commencing to dust down the lower flight of stairs, prevented me from returning to the office for twenty minutes or half-an-hour. In the meanwhile the old bag was there by herself; and the writing-table was strown with documents of the utmost importance—for my uncle had departed for church with the impression that he had locked the door of that office, whereas he had not. The infamous woman examined those papers; and she saw enough to convince herself, by certain memoranda or letters—perhaps both—that forgeries had been committed! Yes, forgeries by the late Mr. Waldron!—forgeries to which my uncle must have undoubtedly been privy!"

"Forgeries concerning what case?" asked the nobleman. "You may speak frankly: I will betray nothing that you tell me."

"Forgeries," answered Cicely, "concerning that noted business of the Ormsby Peerage—an affair, which as I have heard, caused so great a sensation about nineteen or twenty years ago. But of course you know that the very claimant himself was Agnes Evelyn's father!"

"Proceed, Mrs. Hardress—proceed," said the nobleman. "You were telling me that Mrs. Chicklade saw those papers lying upon your uncle's desk. He had doubtless been referring to them—"

"Yes. Somehow or another," continued Cicely, "he was always harping on that case—always expressing his conviction that something would some day or another come of it. But to return to Mrs. Chicklade,—you can doubtless now conjecture, Mr. Hargrave, how she availed herself of the knowledge which she had that day acquired in my uncle's office, to endeavour to extort money from him. It is evident that she wrote him a note demanding five thousand pounds; and she insisted upon a positive answer, *yes* or *no*, by a certain hour, to be left at a certain house; and that house was the one in Norton Street. My uncle sent a reply; and it was this letter which I found amongst the papers of the deceased Mrs. Chicklade when I purchased them from Mrs. Maddox. How my uncle could have been so imprudent as he was to say so much in that letter which he wrote as an answer, I cannot tell. Such imprudence was most inconsistent with the general cautiousness of his character. However, very sure it is that my uncle

was sufficient in that letter—although it was brief enough—to enable me to comprehend when it fell into my hand, what stupendous secret it was which Mrs. Chicklade had got in her possession, and likewise by what means it had come to her knowledge."

"And that letter," said Lord Ormsby,—"what has become of it?"

"I gave it to my uncle," replied Cicely, "and he destroyed it. It is true, Mr. Hargrave, as you have stated, that he purchased it from me with a dower of thirty thousand pounds. But tell me how this fact came to your knowledge."

"Agnes Evelyn casually mentioned that such was your dower," rejoined Lord Ormsby; "and then, as other circumstances gradually came to my knowledge, it was easy by putting two and two together, to conjecture how you wrung such an immense sum from the niggardness and selfishness of Mr. Timperley. And now, Mrs. Hardress, before we quit this topic, I would fain make an observation or two. You even now expressed a wonder that your uncle, usually so cautious and so prudent, should have committed himself so fatally in that letter. Let me tell you, Mrs. Hardress, that the solution of the seeming mystery is easy:—it was Providence that did it! Yes!—how often do we mark that when a crime is perpetrated, the criminal commits some oversight or some inadvertence which ultimately leads to his detection! Here, in the case of which we are speaking, your uncle committed the oversight of recording on paper an allusion to one crime—namely, the forgery; and this very same letter subsequently led to the detection of his guilt in respect to the other crime which he afterwards committed—namely, the murder! It is thus by ways apparently so mysterious and inscrutable that Providence works out its objects!"

Mrs. Hardress reflected seriously for a few minutes upon the observations which had just fallen from the lips of her visitor; and then with a sigh she murmured, "Yes—it must be so!"

"It is so, Mrs. Hardress," rejoined Lord Ormsby solemnly. "But now let us proceed to another topic. I accidentally learnt just now, on making certain inquiries, that young Mr. Barrington and his wife had been staying at this very hotel."

"Yes—it was a week ago," replied Cicely. "They were only here a few hours—"

"And something unpleasant occurred, I believe?" said Lord Ormsby. "At least so the landlord just now told me."

"Ah! then you were inquiring after them, Mr. Hargrave?"

"Not exactly," responded the nobleman; "for I thought that they would have left immediately upon hearing of the death of old Mr. Barrington—which intelligence must have reached them a week back—"

"It did so reach them," rejoined Cicely.

"But I was inquiring," pursued Mr. Hargrave, "whether a certain Mr. De Vere—"

"Ah! Mr. De Vere?"—and Mrs. Hardress could scarcely repress a start or keep back a blush.

"Yes—Charles De Vere," continued Lord Ormsby. "I am aware that you know him. Well then, as I was saying, I inquired if he were known at this hotel; for I knew not exactly

at which one he was stopping, or whether indeed he was still tarrying in Florence at all;—and the landlord answered me that the last time he had seen Mr. De Vere was when the Barringtons were at the establishment; and then, on a second thought, he said that Mr. De Vere had subsequently called upon you."

"Yes—I think he did—most likely he did," said Cicely: and she looked slightly confused.

"I believe, Mrs. Hardress," continued Lord Ormsby, "that Charles De Vere is an admirable young man—well-principled—right minded—and high spirited? You are aware that he is engaged to our mutual friend Agnes?"

"The young lady in whom you are so deeply interested," said Cicely, in a musing tone; for she was revolving in her mind an idea which had just struck her.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Ormsby; "I am indeed interested in Agnes Evelyn!—so deeply interested that notwithstanding all the good accounts I have heard of young De Vere, I could not think of sanctioning his suit in respect to Agnes—I mean I could not as Miss Evelyn's friend countenance it, unless by personal inquiries and researches I should have obtained the completest corroboration of all the eulogies which have thus reached my ears."

"Does De Vere know you?" asked Cicely.

"He has never seen me," replied Lord Ormsby. "He has heard of me, just in the same way as you have done, through the medium of Agnes. But he is not aware that I am at all interested in Agnes: he is even ignorant that I am acquainted with her: for to tell you the truth, Mrs. Hardress, I bade Agnes abstain from mentioning the subject in the last letter which she wrote to Charles: because——"

"I understand you, Mr. Hargrave!" exclaimed Cicely: "it was because you intended to prosecute your inquiries into Charles De Vere's character secretly and privately, before you should suffer him to learn that you were at all interested in the matter."

"Precisely so," answered Ormsby. "Therefore you will oblige me by not mentioning to Mr. De Vere, if he should again call upon you——"

"He will not again call upon me, Mr. Hargrave," said Cicely, with a tone and look which showed that there was a deep meaning in her words; for her mind was now fully made up how she should act in respect to the idea which had ere now struck her.

"He will not call here again?" said Lord Ormsby, catching at the lady's words.

"No, sir. I should think not—and I should hope not," she replied, with a significant emphasis.

"Mrs. Hardress," said Lord Ormsby, "if you know anything in reference to Charles De Vere, I beseech that you will not conceal it from me! By your friendship for Agnes I adjure you to be candid and explicit!"

"One word, Mr. Hargrave!" said Cicely. "Some time ago my husband fought a duel with Charles De Vere—it was however before he was my husband—still if I said anything against Mr. De Vere, it might possibly be thought that it was a species of vengeance I was wreaking on Hector's behalf——"

"Impossible, Mrs. Hardress!" ejaculated Ormsby. "No one could conceive such an absurdity. I beseech you to be candid with me!"

"If the communication be considered confidential," resumed Cicely, "I can have no objection—indeed, as you have said, for the sake of my dear friend it becomes a veritable duty; and therefore, Mr. Hargrave, relying upon your honour as a gentleman not to compromise me in any way, I will tell you what I know. It is all connected with these Barringtons——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Ormsby: "to tell you the truth I did not like the aspect of the affair when I heard ere now from the landlord of this hotel that Gustavus Barrington left his wife in the night-time, and that the very next morning Charles De Vere came and took her away. Was this really so?"

"It was actually so," responded Mrs. Hardress. "There was a terrible scene betwixt Gustavus Barrington and his quadroon wife; and if it had not been for my timely intervention, murder would have been committed. The young man left his wife at once, and at an early hour in the morning Mrs. Barrington entreated me to send and fetch Mr. De Vere. I did so,—thinking that it was to a friend that the quadroon was about to appeal, and little dreaming that it was a paramour whom in her desperation she was invoking!"

"Good heavens! poor Agnes!" murmured Lord Ormsby. "And De Vere came at once?"

"He lost not a moment," pursued Cicely: "he was here instantaneously; and I regret to add, Mr. Hargrave, that it was in the most shameless manner he took the quadroon away with him. Yes—leaving the man-servant behind to pack up his master's effects——"

"Good God!" ejaculated Ormsby, deeply affected, "that a young man of whom I was inclined to think so highly, should prove so profligate and unprincipled!—Ah," he mentally added, "it is sufficient to plunge me back again into that cynicism which made me mistrust all human nature!"

"And then, would you believe it, Mr. Hargrave?" continued Cicely, inwardly rejoicing at the signal revenge she was thus wreaking upon De Vere—"would you believe it? the depraved young man dared to call upon me the very day after he had taken another's wife under his protection! And it was not until *then* that I became fully aware of his great iniquity: but when the discourse naturally turned upon the affair of the Barringtons, he gave vent to expressions which snote me with the conviction that he was the author of the entire mischief."

"There is consequently no possibility of error or misconception?" said Ormsby in a sorrowful tone.

"Alas, no, Mr. Hargrave!" replied Cicely: "the case is only too transparent. Indeed, Charles De Vere—while admitting the other day in my presence that jealousy on the part of Gustavus was the origin of the quarrel—expressed his own bitter regret that he himself had got involved in such a dilemma."

"A dilemma indeed!" ejaculated Ormsby. "Oh! this is a sad tale for me to hear to Agnes Evelyn! Do you know whether Gustavus Barrington has gone to England?"

"I know nothing of his proceedings," responded Cicely.

"And you are also ignorant, perhaps, of the course which De Vere may have pursued? Surely he would never dare to take his quadroom mistress to Naples, where his mother now resides: for I believe that she is a most estimable lady."

"I have not seen Mr. De Vere," answered Cicely, "since the day he was bold enough to call upon me as I have already told you: and then I dismissed him from my presence. Yes—on discovering from his own admission how guilty he had been, I bade him leave the room!"

"But how did he become acquainted in the first instance with young Mr. Barrington and his wife?" inquired Ormsby.

"From something which the quadroom told me," responded Cicely, "it would appear that Charles De Vere partook of their hospitality when they were living at a retired village in the Apennines, and when he was escaping from the fortalice of Bagno, during the many complications which were associated with the marvellously tragic history of Lucrezia di Mirano. No doubt on that occasion Charles De Vere repaid Gustavus Barrington's generous hospitality by the seduction of his wife!"

"Enough! enough!" ejaculated Ormsby, "it is indeed all too plainly apparent! Good heavens! the farther and farther I get upon the pathway of the world, the more do I become acquainted with the iniquities, duplicities, and hypocrisies of human nature! As if even all my former experiences were not sufficient, but that there must be new teachings to open to my knowledge fresh roads in the realms of crime! But enough, I say, upon that hideous topic!—Ah! by the bye, Mrs. Hardress, you were speaking of the complications which arose in respect to those recent circumstances that must have filled all Florence with amazement and horror. Now that I happen to be in this city, I would like to visit the Mirano mansion. Not that I have any morbid curiosity in respect to the place itself:—heaven forbid! But I have been informed that the late Marchioness possessed a picture of Lucrezia Borgia, to which she herself bore the most wondrous resemblance."

"And you have been rightly informed, Mr. Hargrave," answered Cicely. "That portrait, together with other pictures, was conveyed to the Count of Ramorino's private residence: but it has now been restored to the Mirano mansion, which together with all the possessions of the guilty Marchioness, has been confiscated by the Government. It is intended, I believe, that everything should be sold shortly; but in the meanwhile visitors may inspect the picture gallery at the mansion."

"I thank you for this information," answered Lord Ormsby; "and though but little inclined to sight-seeing in the present painful state of my feelings, yet I assuredly shall avail myself of the opportunity to contemplate a picture which may be regarded as the two-fold representation of remarkable female criminals. And now, Mrs. Hardress, with your permission I will turn to another topic. Might I inquire how long you have been travelling on the Continent?"

"A little more than a month—about five weeks," said Cicely. "We left England immediately after that sad affair of which you may perhaps have heard: I mean the death of Mr. Clif-

ford in the duel which he fought with my husband."

"I merely put the question, Mrs. Hardress," resumed Lord Ormsby, "because I was about to inquire whether during your travels on the Continent, you had chanced to fall in with that unfortunate girl—perhaps you know to whom I allude?—the cousin of Agnes!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Cicely. "You mean Floribel?"

"Yes—the unfortunate Floribel, who was seduced under the semblance of a marriage by that villain whose name you ere now mentioned—Theodore Clifford!"

Cicely reflected seriously and deeply while Lord Ormsby was thus speaking.

"He is almost sure," she thought to herself, "now that he is in Florence, to discover that Ciprina and Floribel were one and the same person; and if I tell him a falsehood on the subject, he may then disbelieve my statements in reference to Charles De Vere. I must therefore tell him the truth! But he need not know that my husband is upon Floribel's track—perhaps by this time with Floribel herself: who can tell?"

These were the reflections which swept through Cicely's mind; and then, when Lord Ormsby had finished speaking, she said, "Yes, Mr. Hargrave—I have seen Floribel!"

"Ah! you have seen her?" he ejaculated. "This is one of my objects in coming to Italy: for I faithfully promised Agnes that I would discover, if possible, the place where the unfortunate girl had secluded herself——"

"Mr. Hargrave," interrupted Cicely, "I am about to give you another proof of my friendship and confidence. Prepare yourself to hear something extraordinary——"

"What! fresh marvels?" exclaimed the nobleman. "Ah! heaven grant that they be not connected with fresh iniquities also!"

"Oh, again I am about to grieve you, Mr. Hargrave!" said Cicely. "You have heard of a certain associate of the Marchioness of Mirano—one whom report represents to have been almost as depraved and profligate as the Marchioness herself——"

"What! Ciprina?" exclaimed Ormsby. "Yes—every one must have heard of her who has heard of the Marchioness! But what, in heaven's name, can this allusion to Ciprina have to do with Floribel?"

"You are about to visit the Mirano mansion," responded Cicely. "There, amongst the new paintings, you will behold a beautiful picture of a Bride. It was the work of one of the most eminent Florentine artists——"

"Well—and this portrait?" cried Ormsby, somewhat impatiently.

"The face is that of Ciprina," continued Cicely. "It was she who sat as the artist's model. Go and look at that face——"

"Just heaven!" cried Ormsby, "do you mean—But no! no! it is impossible! As for me, I have never seen Floribel herself: but I have contemplated a portrait of her, beautifully executed by the pencil of Agnes."

"Then go and look upon the face of Ciprina," rejoined Cicely, "and you will know where I have met Floribel!"

Lord Ormsby groined in the bitterness of his spirit: for it was now impossible to doubt any longer the meaning of the lady's words.

CHAPTER XL.

LORD ORMSBY'S PROCEEDINGS.

ON quitting the hotel, Lord Ormsby proceeded direct to the Mirano mansion; and he inquired whether he could be permitted to visit the portrait gallery. The reply was in the affirmative; and the steward forthwith made his appearance to escort the visitor. In the seclusion of his American life the nobleman had studied much, and had taught himself several European languages. He spoke French and Italian with very considerable ability; and he was thus enabled to converse with the steward who was now conducting him to the portrait-gallery.

"Strange and fearful events were those which recently took place," said Ormsby, "connected with this palatial mansion."

"Yes—sad, very sad, signor!" was the response. "But not the least astonishing was the discovery made by myself, Signor De Vere, and Signor Marcellin, of the Minister of Police, hidden in the secret passages of the building!"

"Yes—I heard of the incident," replied Ormsby.

"Of course the Count of Ramorino," continued the steward, "was well acquainted with those mysterious places, because the Marchioness had told him about them when she wanted him to carry off certain persons who were obnoxious to her. So when the Count got involved in such fearful troubles and warrants were issued for his arrest, he doubtless remembered the secret passages, and it struck him that they would constitute an excellent hiding-place until the heat of pursuit should have abated. Ah! never was seen such a crest-fallen individual as the Count when he was dragged forth from his hiding-hole, and when we surrendered him up into the hands of the very *sbirri* who but a few hours back were his own most subservient slaves. The mighty Chief of Police, before whom all Florence had quailed and trembled, presented as subject a picture of human nothingness as ever was contemplated!"

"And what has become of him?" inquired Lord Ormsby.

"He has been sent as a prisoner to that very fortress of Bagno to which he was so fond of sending others. There he will doubtless remain for life—unless by any means he should succeed in effecting his escape, as Signor De Vere and the Signora Ciprina so marvellously contrived to do."

"And that Signora Ciprina," said Ormsby,— "to what nation did she belong?"

"It was not exactly known," answered the steward; "but there are reasons for supposing that she was an English lady. I would rather not say anything more about her, signor—unless it were to speak of the good qualities she possessed; for everybody liked her within these walls. And so for that matter we liked the Marchioness also. Ah! who could have foreseen what dreadful things were to happen?"

The picture-gallery was now reached; and Ormsby asked, "Which is the portrait of Lucrezia Borgia?"

"This one," replied the steward, as he indicated the famous painting which had been restored to its place in the gallery.

"What beauty!" exclaimed the nobleman: "what a lovely countenance! and what an amiable expression! And did your mistress so strikingly resemble this picture——"

"That it seemed as if she herself had sat as its original!" added the steward.

"And I believe," resumed Ormsby, "that you have in the gallery a picture representing the Signora Ciprina?"

"Yes," cried the steward; "and a wondrous likeness it is! The artist drew her as a Bride. I know not why such a fantasy took him—or whether it were that having fixed upon his subject, he availed himself of the offer of the Marchioness that her friend the Signora Ciprina should sit as the model. However, the signora *did* serve as the original of the picture; and the Marchioness bought it for a very considerable sum of money. Here it is, signor."

One glance at the countenance, and Lord Ormsby was satisfied that he had comprehended Mrs. Hardress aright, and that Floribel and Ciprina were one and the same person! Yes—there was that countenance, the same in its soft sensuous beauty—the same in its expression of voluptuous languor, as that which the nobleman had seen at Sidney Villa! The portrait was of life size: it showed the greater part of the figure; and the voluptuousness of the countenance was subdued by the contrast existing in the chastity of the toilet. At the bottom of the picture Cupid was introduced with his wings and his bow; and all the other details were exquisitely designed and admirably executed.

But with what mournful feelings was it that the nobleman gazed upon the picture! That Floribel, whose beauty if accompanied by propriety of conduct, might have secured for her some alliance as brilliant as it was honourable, had become a lost and degraded creature! Ormsby beheld before him in that picture only the sensuous personification of PLEASURE; and his heart sank sorrowfully within him, until it suddenly leapt with an ecstatic bound at the thought of his well-beloved daughter, who in contrast with her cousin might be regarded as the veritable incarnation of the most ethereal ideas of chaste BEAUTY.

Having contemplated the two principal pictures in that gallery, Lord Ormsby cared not to bestow any attention upon the rest; and he slipped a couple of pieces of gold into the steward's hand as a recompense for his attention. The steward accompanied him down to the threshold of the principal gate; and the nobleman lingered for a few instants there to listen to some remarks which the steward was making upon recent events. All of a sudden the steward nudged the nobleman in a significant manner; and at the same instant he bowed to a handsome and elegant-looking young gentleman who was passing.

"There, signor!" hastily whispered the steward; "that is the very young Englishman who bore so conspicuous a part in the adventures!"

"What!" ejaculated Ormsby: "do you mean Signor De Vere?"

"The same!" answered the steward. "Is he not a most interesting-looking young gentleman?"

But without giving any reply, Ormsby hastened away; for De Vere at that instant turned round a corner, and the nobleman was determined to follow him.

It was not however with any definite intention that Ormsby thus got upon his track; he had not made up his mind whether he should introduce himself to our hero and reproach him for his perfidy towards Agnes—or whether he should adopt some other course to let him know that he must think no more of that beautiful, innocent, and artless creature. And as he thus followed him—as he thus for the first time beheld Charles De Vere—Lord Ormsby could not be otherwise than struck by his handsome, genteel, and elegant appearance; and he mentally exclaimed, "So far as the external aspect is concerned, he is the very husband whom I should have selected for my daughter! Alas, that the inward man corresponds not with the outer!"

Charles continued his way along two or three streets, Lord Ormsby following him. At length our hero stopped at a small but neat-looking house, which he entered. He remained there for upwards of two hours; and during the whole time Lord Ormsby kept such a watch upon the house that he never once lost sight of the front door. At the expiration of that interval Charles issued forth; and with slow footsteps, as well as in an evidently thoughtful mood, he continued his way.

"He regrets the fatal connexion that he has formed!" thought the nobleman to himself. "But, Ah! would it not perhaps be as well that I should obtain a corroboration of the terrible intelligence I have heard concerning him? Although, alas! it is scarcely possible to doubt the statements made by Mrs. Hardress, yet so serious is the matter—so completely is the happiness of Agnes at stake—that it is my bounden duty to avoid forming a judgment on slight grounds! Yes—I will investigate this matter farther; and then if the worst should be confirmed—as I fear it will end *must*—I shall at least have the consolation of knowing that I did not decide too rapidly!"

By the time that Lord Ormsby had reached the end of his reflections, Charles De Vere was out of sight; and now, as the nobleman was on the point of crossing the street in order to knock at the door of the house, that door itself opened and a respectably clad female came forth. She proceeded along the street with a basket in her hand: she was evidently on her way to make purchases for the use of the household. Lord Ormsby followed her to a little distance; and when she had turned into another street, he accented her.

"My good woman," he at once said, slipping four or five pieces of gold into her hand, "I wish for some information which you can give me."

"I, signor?" and she looked at him with astonishment. "You are a stranger to me—you are not an Italian—"

"But it is not only with Italian people that you have to do," interrupted Lord Ormsby; "for it is not many minutes since an English gentleman issued from your house."

"Ah, true, signor!" said the woman, who still held the pieces of gold hesitatingly in her hand—*anxious to consign them to her pocket, and yet not liking to do so ere she learnt the precise motive for which so liberal a bribe was given.*

"And perhaps," added Ormsby, "you have some other person beneath that roof who is not an Italian?"

"Well, signor—and if it were so, what then?" demanded the female.

"A dark-complexioned lady!" ejaculated the nobleman, fixing his eyes keenly on her countenance.

"I hope, signor, that you are not going to make any trouble about it," said Catrina Petraro—for she the woman was: "but if you mean these coins as a reward for my speaking the truth—"

"That is precisely what I do mean," rejoined the nobleman. "So now we understand each other. Keep the money. I shall ask you to say nothing that will in any way compromise yourself."

"Good, signor!"—and now the coins were consigned to the pocket.

"You have admitted the point at which I was aiming," resumed Ormsby,—*"that is to say, a lady with a dusky complexion—very handsome—with a fine figure—is living beneath your roof."*

"Yes, signor: I have already admitted it," answered Catrina.

"And she is visited by the young Englishman whom I just now followed to your house, and whom I saw go forth again after tarrying there precisely two hours?"

"This also is true, signor," said the woman.

"Did that gentleman introduce the lady to your house?" inquired Ormsby.

"Yes, signora. We had some trifling knowledge of the gentleman, because he was mixed up in the recent affairs connected with the Marchioness di Mirano—and we had Signor Paoli staying at our house—"

"Ah!" ejaculated the nobleman: "then your name must be Petraro?"

"That is my name, signor—Catrina Petraro at your service."

"Signor Paoli arrived safe in England a week ago—and I saw him. But let us revert to the topic in which I am most interested. You say that—"

"I was about to tell you, signor," interrupted Catrina, "that as we knew the young English gentleman De Vere, we of course took his recommendation when he came one morning and said that he could send us a lady as a lodger. My brother did not for a moment think it necessary to ask about her respectability: but to tell you the truth, signor, I thought she was a little touched here;" and Catrina significantly tapped her own forehead.

"What made you think so?" asked Ormsby, as he walked slowly along the street by Catrina Petraro's side.

"Because Signor De Vere," she responded, "told me so particularly to keep the strictest watch upon the lady's actions—to follow her when she went out—and especially to take note whether she followed him when he left her."

"Ah!" said Ormsby: "these were strange injunctions—were they not?"

Catrina did not immediately reply; but at the expiration of a minute, she said, "We are not very rich people, signor—money is an object to us—and though perhaps my brother would not have consented to take the lady into the house if he had known that such instructions as these were given, yet I was a trifle less particular—and—and in plain terms I consented to all that Signor De Vere dictated. But as heaven is my judge, I fancied it was because the woman must be crazed—I had then no suspicion that——"

"That what?" demanded Ormsby, as Catrine stopped short.

"That the lady was Signor De Vere's mistress," rejoined Catrina.

"Ah! then you have made this discovery?" exclaimed the nobleman.

"I fear there can be little doubt about it," responded Signora Petraro. "Look you, signor! the very day after the lady was brought to the house, my niece—whose name is also Catrine—went up to present her with a bouquet as a token of civility: she did not know that the young English gentleman was there—so she opened the door without knocking—and then she was very sorry, signor—for both the young gentleman and the young lady looked very much confused. The gentleman snatched away his hand, which the lady was pressing in her own, or else to her lips—I don't know exactly which; and whether he had his arm around her waist or not, I cannot exactly say—for I did not like to question my niece too closely—she is only an innocent young girl of fifteen or sixteen years of age——"

"Ah, well," said Ormsby; "but at all events enough transpired to convince you that the young lady is the young gentleman's mistress!"

"Oh, no doubt about it, signor!" exclaimed the woman; "no doubt about it! The more's the pity: for she is a splendidly handsome creature, although her skin is even darker than that of an Italian. And he too seems such a nice young man! But they do not agree—and it is evident that there is an awful jealousy or something of that sort—for the quarrels—Oh, the quarrels!"

"Good heaven, is this possible?" exclaimed Ormsby: then to himself he added, "Ah! unfortunate young man! thou art already most terribly punished! God help any one who comes within the scope of that quodroon's fierce, overbearing, imperious temper!"

"Oh, the alterations are sad enough!" continued Catrina: "but as they are carried on in the English language, we cannot of course understand a syllable of all that is passing——"

"And how often does the young gentleman visit her?" demanded Ormsby.

"Every day regularly," rejoined Catrina; "sometimes in the morning—sometimes in the evening. To-day, as you have said, signor, he was there two hours; and the best part of the time they were arguing and reasoning and quarrelling. It was lucky my brother did not overhear it; or I do really think he would have gone up and turned the young gentleman out of doors. But now they must leave! I myself shall not try to shield them any longer. I shall speak to Signor De Vere tomorrow, and beg him to find another lodging for the lady."

"I thank you for the information you have

given me," said Lord Ormsby: "it is, alas! corroborative of all the misgivings that I had previously entertained."

"Perhaps, signor, the young gentleman is your son?" said the woman; "or the young lady may be related to you?"

"No," interrupted Ormsby; "but for other reasons I am interested—alas! deeply and mournfully interested, in all that has transpired to my knowledge in reference to that young man. But do not mention either to him or the lady that an English gentleman has been making any inquiries concerning them."

"Oh, no! I pledge myself to silence," answered Catrina.

Lord Ormsby then took leave of her; and as he was proceeding at a slow pace and with pensive looks towards his hotel, he met the Hon. Mrs. Hardress. She was alone; for her sister-in-law Josephine felt indisposed and remained in her own apartment.

"Mrs. Hardress," said Ormsby, "I have received the sad confirmation of everything that you told me. In the first place I have been to the Mireno mansion; and there I beheld the picture in which is represented the beautiful face of Floribel. Tell me—do you know whither the erring girl has proceeded?"

"That is a complete mystery," replied Mrs. Hardress: "she departed with a strange abruptness."

"But this is not all that I have to tell you," resumed the nobleman. "Another statement that you made me, has just been confirmed. I allude to Charles De Vere and the quodroon wife of Gustave Barrington."

"Ah!" ejaculated Cicely. "And now, Mr. Hargrave, have you——"

"I discovered where the profligate young man had lodged the faithless adulterous wife!"

"Oh, you have discovered her abode?" cried Cicely: "this is most fortunate! Just at the moment I was coming out of the hotel—not a quarter of an hour ago—a courier arrived from England—from Messrs. Millard and Co.—I think that was the name——"

"Yes, yes!" ejaculated Ormsby; "the London agents of Mr. Pinnock of Jamaica."

"Well then," continued Cicely, "the courier brings letters of the utmost importance from the Messrs. Millard; for it seems that Mr. Pinnock, her uncle, is dead——"

"Dead?" echoed Ormsby.

"Yes—dead!—and he has left her his entire fortune. All this the courier knows; for he gave me the details, as the landlord had been recommending the man to address himself to me to see whether I could afford him any information in respect to the abode of the lady whom he sought."

"These are indeed important tidings for Emi'y Barrington," said Ormsby. "You would be rendering her a kindness, Mrs. Hardress, if you would direct the courier to the house where he may find her."

Lord Ormsby then named the street in which Petraro's house was situated; and Cicely promised to return at once to the hotel to communicate to the courier the discovery she had made.

"She will doubtless have to go to Jamaica," thought Cicely; "and then Charles De Vere will

lose his mistress, just as he has lost his lovely Agnes!"

Lord Ormeby, on again parting from Mrs. Hardres, pursued his way towards the hotel at which he had taken up his own quarters. He was profoundly afflicted on account of Charles De Vere's supposed perfidy towards Agnes; and it was with bitterness that he mentally ejaculated, "Misfortune has attended upon my journey to Florence! It would seem as if I came hither but to learn everything bad in reference to Charles, and to discover the very worst in respect to Floribel!"

The mention of the name of Floribel suddenly reminded the nobleman of the promise which he had made to his beloved daughter Agnes,—to the effect "that he would endeavour to find out where Floribel was, for that she must not be suffered to remain abroad in the world by herself, either as an outcast in her own estimation or else exposed to fresh temptation."

But what course was he to adopt in order to recover his lost niece? how must he proceed to get upon the track of the wandering daughter of his perished wife's sister? If any one could furnish him with a clue, it was Charles De Vere. But how could he present himself to Charles?—in what capacity? Though utterly unable to make up his mind on the point—feeling himself indeed more at a loss than he had ever done in his life—he wended his way towards the hotel at which our hero was staying.

On inquiry, he found that Charles was in his apartment; and he was conducted thither by one of the waiters. Our hero rose from the table at which he was seated writing a letter; and he bowed with his wonted courtesy to the visitor, whom he requested to be seated. This near view which Ormeby obtained of Charles, only tended to aggravate the painfulness of the emotions which he was previously experiencing; for he thought to himself, "Good heavens! that one on whose features nature has stamped everything excellent and magnanimous, should be inwardly so depraved and profligate!"

But Lord Ormeby had not gone through half a lifetime of trouble without knowing how to conceal whatever emotions were agitating within him; and it was therefore with unruined countenance and with a calm level voice that he said, "You will perhaps pardon me for not at once giving my name, Mr. De Vere; and you will excuse me for being equally abrupt in announcing my business. In plain terms, therefore, I wish to know whether you can afford me any intelligence concerning Floribel Lister?"

Our hero started as if suddenly galvanised; and he echoed the name, "Floribel Lister?"

"Yes, sir," continued Ormeby. "I am aware that you know her—indeed you know her well. You have seen her very lately—and if any one can tell where to find her, it is you."

"Now that I have recovered from the surprise into which the abruptness of your question threw me," said our hero, with a frank calmness and yet with a manly dignity of demeanour, "I would ask you, sir, who you are, and on whose behalf you come to catechise me?"

"I am one who experiences a deep interest in Floribel Lister. Yea—and in her cousin Agnes also—as you perhaps may as well at once learn!"

"But why, sir," asked Charles, more and more astonished and bewildered, "do you adopt so much severity of look and tone towards me? You actually seem to address me as if I were one who had given you some offence!"

"Perhaps I shall explain myself fully before we part," rejoined Lord Ormeby. "In the first instance let us continue to speak of Floribel Lister. You, Mr. De Vere, recently beheld her: she was living in this city under the name of Ciprina."

"O!" ejaculated Charles, as a wildly painful thought suddenly swept through his brain; "does Agnes know that her cousin is not all that I have represented her?"

"Talk not of Agnes now, sir!" interrupted Ormeby, with unyielding sternness. "We will presently come to that topic."

"Oh! believe me," exclaimed our hero, "that if I have kept Agnes in the dark relative to whatever I may know prejudicial to her cousin, it has been from the best of motives! And then too, I did really believe at one time that she purposed to retire into seclusion, and lead an amended life!"

There was a frankness in De Vere's look and tone which Ormeby could not help admiring for the instant: but still it was with unflinching severity that he said, "I beg, sir, that you will answer my question. What has become of Floribel Lister, who lately dwelt in this city under the name of the Signora Ciprina?"

"As I have a soul to be saved, I do not know!" ejaculated Charles. "She left Florence suddenly, at the very moment when I purposed to reason with her seriously and solemnly upon the course of life she had adopted."

"And can you, Mr. De Vere," asked Ormeby, "lay your hand upon your heart with the conviction that you are a proper shepherd to reclaim the lost sheep?"

Charles started; he looked very hard at his visitor: he again felt bewildered and astonished; and he said, "There is something in your appearance which forbids me to think that you have come hither to offer me a gratuitous insult, and therefore I request that you will as deliberately explain your meaning as you have just put that singular question."

"I should give you credit for frankness, Mr. De Vere," rejoined the nobleman, "if I were not aware that you are capable of the most hypocritical effrontery."

Again Charles started; and he ejaculated, "By heavens, sir, this is going too far. You know that it is I! You are evidently a gentleman by social position—you even have an air of distinction; and it is therefore impossible you can be ignorant of the grossness of your conduct towards one who has never injured you. Now then, sir, explain yourself!"

"The only explanation which I have at present to give," answered Ormeby, "is that in the name of Miss Evelyn, and on her behalf, I recommend you to think no more of her as your intended wife."

"What?" cried our hero, to whom this announcement was as replete with a sudden excommunication as if it were impalement itself; "you tell me this seriously, sir? Oh, no! sooner would I believe that the sun had ceased to shine on high than that Agnes Evelyn was unfaithful!"



"Unfaithful? No, sir!" responded Ormsby. "But without entering into any particulars for the present—I have neither the time nor the temper to do so—let me thoroughly impress you with the fact that everything is at an end between Agnes Evelyn and yourself!"

Charles reeled and staggered two or three paces backward, as if he were smitten a sudden blow or seized with a vertigo. He gasped for breath, and his eyes glared wildly; for Ormsby spoke as if with the voice of doom itself.

"And now, sir," said the nobleman, rising from his seat, "I shall take my departure."

"One word, sir! one word!" cried Charles, who was half distracted. "Pray tell me who you are! Do you come as a messenger from Agnes? Or by what other right? Oh, I knew not that she had a relative in the world!—and surely none other

then a kinsman could have been sent with such a message as this?"

"No matter who I am," said Ormsby; "you will sooner or later know. But rest assured that I am not usurping in respect to Agnes a right which——"

"Ah, then," cried Charles, clutching at a sudden hope, "it is without the knowledge or consent of Agnes that you are interfering between us!"

"Within a very short time, Mr. De Vere," said Ormsby, "you shall receive a letter from Miss Evelyn which will fully confirm the announcement I have made to you."

"But what have I done?" demanded our hero: "why am I thus cruelly treated? Oh! not for a single instant can I think so ill of Agnes as to suppose that she has listened to the offers of another who may perhaps be richer than myself! No,

no!—even though she should discard me, I will yet love and worship her; because I shall have the conviction that for some unknown reason she must be right—although, my God! it will be death to me!"

The unhappy young man pressed his hand wildly to his brow; and a deep convulsing sob smote upon the ear of Lord Ormsby.

"If," cried Charles, "my fault has been that I have loved her too devotedly and too well—if it be a subject of reproach that in the fervour of my enthusiastic passion I have placed her image upon a pedestal and made it the object of my idolatrous worship, so that God himself is angered against me—if on account of my readiness to lay down my life for Agnes' sake, so that not a single hair of her head should be injured,—if for all these reasons I am to be discarded and cast off, then heaven knows that they are potent enough!"

Lord Ormsby was staggered; and for a moment he felt an illimitable compassion stealing in upon his soul on behalf of this young man whose looks were calculated to inspire so deep an interest, and whose language was fraught with so much apparent sincerity. But then—like a blight upon the choicest flowers of the garden—like a frost upon the tender blossoms of the trees—came the withering recollection of all the statements he had heard from the lips alike of Mrs. Herdres and Cristina Petraro. It was therefore with a mournful shake of the head that Lord Ormsby said, "Nothing can change the resolve which is taken. Everything is at an end between Agnes and yourself!"

He was turning towards the door, when Charles exclaimed, "One word more, sir! one word more! only one word!"

Ormsby stopped; and just at that moment the door opened. A waiter entered; and said, addressing himself to De Vere, "If you please, signor, to pardon this intrusion: but your mother——"

"My mother?" ejaculated our hero. "What of my mother?"

"She is here, signor. The lady has just arrived—I told her that you had come one with you—she would not therefore immediately come——"

"My mother here!" cried Charles. "Oh, let me hasten to her! But Ah!" he ejaculated, catching sight of Ormsby, whose presence for the moment he had forgotten: "will you answer me one question, sir?" and now he spoke in English again, so that the waiter should not understand him. "Tell me who you are, that you have thus had the power of wielding so terrible an influence over my happiness—aye, over my entire destiny!"

The waiter, judging by the vehemence with which Charles spoke, that it would be discreet for him to withdraw, opened the door to retire. Mrs. De Vere was already in the ante-room; and the instant the door opened she rushed into the inner apartment.

"Charles! my dearest boy Charles!" she cried, flinging her arms about his neck and straining him to her bosom; "how uneasy have you made me! This prolonged absence——"

"Mother!—dear mother!" he exclaimed; "I wrote to tell you the cause——"

"Then your letters must have miscarried!" eja-

culated Mrs. De Vere. "I was so uneasy that I could not keep away any longer!"

"Well, dear mother," said Charles, "we will discuss all this presently. You see that I have a gentleman with me."

Mrs. De Vere abruptly withdrew her arms from about her son's neck; and she turned towards the visitor, whose presence she had not before noticed. Then a sudden and peculiar expression flitted over her countenance—an ejaculation at the same time burst from the nobleman's lips—it was echoed by one from those of the lady, for the recognition was now mutual and complete!

"Good God! is it possible?" was now the wild exclamation that thrilled from Mrs. De Vere's tongue. "Can the dead become alive, and are the lost thus to be found? Yes, yes! it is no delusion! You are Morton Evelyn!"

"And you," cried Lord Ormsby, "are Lucy Maitland!"

CHAPTER XLI.

ORMSBY AND MRS. DE VERE.

WHAT a stupendous revelation was this for Charles De Vere!—we mean the revelation of the fact that the individual whom he beheld before him was Morton Evelyn; for he knew that this was the name of the father of his beloved Agnes,—that father who had so long been looked upon as dead! Yes—her father! And, Oh! Charles was now no longer at a loss to comprehend the right by which this personage proclaimed everything to be at an end betwixt him and Agnes!—but though the source of the power and authority thus to act was no longer a mystery to our hero, he was still as much in the dark as ever to conjecture the grounds upon which that decision so fatal to his happiness had been arrived at.

As for Lord Ormsby himself, he had for the moment forgotten the presence of Charles in the sudden surprise which smote him on recognising Mrs. De Vere; and guarded and cautious though he habitually was, yet in the excitement of the instant he would have ejaculated that name of *Lucy Maitland* all the same, even though death or dishonour might have been the result to the lady herself!

"Yes—I am Morton Evelyn," he said; "and it may indeed appear unto you as if the lost were being found—as if the grave were giving up its dead—and as if the perished and the deceased were being resuscitated! And perhaps never, never should I have proclaimed myself to the world, or returned again amidst the busy haunts of men, were it not that circumstances have marvellously altered with me, and I am in reality that which twenty years ago I only for a brief space fancied myself to be!"

A sudden light appeared to flash in unto the brain of Charles De Vere; and he ejaculated, "Oh, now I understand it all! You are ennobled and you are rich—you are Lord Ormsby in truth and reality—and it is for this reason that your lordship has forbidden me to aspire to the hand of your daughter!"

"What, my poor boy!" exclaimed Mrs. De Vere, turning towards her son and surveying him with mingled anxiety and tender interest: "are you doomed to disappointment in a matter where all your fondest hopes are concerned?"

"Mrs. De Vere," said Lord Ormsby gravely, "I should not of my own accord have entered upon this topic in your presence. Mr. De Vere, you would do well not to pursue it."

"My lord, I have no secrets from my mother," replied the young man.

The nobleman gazed upon him with the deepest attention for a few moments; and he thought to himself, "He is either the most accomplished hypocrite—or else he is the victim of a series of errors or mistakes more extraordinary than were ever before combined in the shape of circumstantial evidence!"

"Mother," exclaimed Charles, with an air of the most ingenuous frankness, "it is evident that you are well acquainted with Lord Ormsby—you must have known his lordship in other times—and I will now leave you with him. You will tell his lordship, my dear mother, how devotedly I love his daughter Agnes—and perhaps you may be enabled to satisfy him that at least by my conduct I am worthy of that young lady, though I have no fortune to offer and no patrician rank to annex unto her own."

Having thus spoken, Charles De Vere rushed from the room, leaving Lord Ormsby and his mother alone together. Then, the instant the door closed behind our hero, Mrs. De Vere sank upon her knees in the presence of the nobleman; and she said in a voice that was full of emotion, "Twenty years ago you were my benefactor—my saviour!—and for these twenty years have I cherished an undying gratitude for your name!"

"Rise, my dear madam—rise!" exclaimed Ormsby, much moved by the scene. "May I hope that naught unpleasant or disagreeable can ensue from the unguarded and indiscreet way in which I ere now ejaculated your name? I mean your son——"

"He will suspect nothing at all associated with the real truth," answered Mrs. De Vere. "He knows that my family name was Maitland—you will perhaps permit me to represent to him that you and I were old friends, and hence the familiar terms in which we addressed each other the moment the recognition was mutual and complete."

"Say what you will, Mrs. De Vere," answered Lord Ormsby: "I shall not contradict you. But have you never mentioned to your son that you were acquainted with me many long years ago?"

"No—never," responded Mrs. De Vere.

"Will he not therefore think it strange," inquired Ormsby, "that such should have been the fact and yet that you should have never mentioned it?"

"I must devise some excuse—must frame some explanation to account for the circumstance. Alas, my lord!" continued Mrs. De Vere, in a sad tone, "it will not be the first time that I have found myself compelled to have recourse to duplicities and deceptions for the purpose of satisfying my son's mind and explaining points whereupon he has questioned me. You may possibly conceive, for instance, that when he has asked me to tell him of

his father—when he has inquired where we were married, and where his sire died, and where he was buried——Oh, my lord! I have felt that to be compelled to give utterance to falsehoods on such solemn points as these, was horrible! horrible! And yet I have been compelled to do so! But you know that Charles is the son of my betrayer—and that betrayer still lives——"

"You never mentioned to me," said Ormsby, "the name of your betrayer."

"No—I remember that I did not," she rejoined: then, after a few moments' reflection, she went on to say, "But towards one who proved so great a benefactor as you, I must have no secrets. My betrayer was Lord Mendlesham. He was married at the time when he seduced me from the path of virtue. Twenty years ago I told you the tale when you met me in the streets of London and rescued me from becoming an outcast irredeemably lost as so many thousands are in that mighty metropolis! Yes—on that memorable evening I told you my tale, though suppressing the name of my seducer. Perhaps you have forgotten it?"

"Not one single word—not one single syllable of that tale have I ever forgotten!" replied Ormsby. "I conceived an interest in your welfare; and often and often have I thought of you and wondered what had become of you. Yee—I recollect you told me that when you first knew your betrayer and learnt to love him, that you were ignorant he was a married man."

"And, Oh! how guilty was his conduct!" exclaimed Mrs. De Vere. "But on this it is now useless to dwell. To a certain extent his lordship has made me a reparation——"

"Perhaps it was through his interest," remarked Ormsby, "that your son—his son, as I may also call him—has obtained the diplomatic appointment he holds?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. De Vere; "and more than that, Lord Mendlesham has made me an allowance of two hundred pounds a year, which income has been regularly paid through the agency of an attorney——Ah! you know him by the bye! I mean Mr. Timperley."

"Mr. Timperley," remarked the nobleman, "after a long career of iniquity, is at length about to be rendered amenable to justice for the crowning turpitude of his life."

"What does your lordship mean?" asked Mrs. De Vere, her curiosity becoming suddenly much excited.

"I mean that he is within the walls of a gaol," responded Ormsby, "accused of the murder of Mrs. Chicklade?"

Mrs. De Vere started with the wildest astonishment; and then she ejaculated, "What! the murderer of Mrs. Chicklade?"

"Yee—there can be no doubt of it," replied Ormsby. "Circumstances have come to light which prove that he had the strongest possible motive at the time to make away with the wretched woman."

"Wretched woman indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. De Vere. "Just at that period she discovered me—she haunted me—harassing my life—extorting money from me—aye, and even placing me in a position most deplorably suspicious in the presence of my own son!—And Mr. Timperley was her murderer! Ah! now I recollect," she ejaculated,

"that very same day Mr. Timperley called upon me!"

"And then he called upon Sir John Dalham," added Ormsby; "and there can be no doubt that after leaving Sir John Dalham's villa, he must have met Mrs. Chicklade in the lane and he killed her."

"And that unfortunate Winifred Barrington," interjected Mrs. De Vere, "was therefore innocent after all. Oh, how great a criminal is the man Timperley! But we were ere now speaking, my lord, of my own circumstances. I owe you all possible explanations:—pray permit me to give them. I am going back twenty years. At that time I was seduced from the paternal home in a distant county by Lord Mendlesham. He brought me up to London and he abandoned me. I was in a way to become a mother. It was you who saved me—yes—you, my benefactor, who saved me from becoming a degraded and lost wanderer in the streets of London! You saved me that night—you subsequently called upon me at the house where I dwelt—and I told you that if I had money sufficient to enable me to get back to my native place, I would throw myself at my parents' feet, and I believed and hoped they would receive their erring daughter back to their arms. You gave me that money. I travelled to my native place: but, alas! my hopes were destined to experience the bitterest disappointment. My mother had died of grief on account of my flight from home: my father spurned me from the door. Yes—he was implacable! No intervention on the part of friends could move him: the letters I sent remained unnoticed. He never forgave me! Almost broken-hearted, I dragged myself away from my native village, to hide my shame elsewhere. In another place where I was a complete stranger I earned a precarious and scanty subsistence with my needle. At length I became a mother: my Charles was born. I then wrote to his father, Lord Mendlesham, imploring that he would not leave his babe to perish for want along with its wretched mother. It was then that either through compunctious feelings, or else for the purpose of hushing up the affair so that it might never come to the ears of his wife, his lordship agreed to allow me the income of two hundred a-year, as I ere now informed you. And then I took the name of De Vere—a name which had once been in my family; and I sought another place of abode. I settled myself in Leicestershire. There I reared my son in virtue and in goodness; and God grant that the tenour of my life for twenty years past may have atoned for my one fault!"

"Oh, yes—it must have done so!" exclaimed Ormsby, much moved: "it must have done so! Mrs. De Vere, I bear none but the most friendly feelings towards you, and you will therefore give me credit for sincerity when I declare that I am rejoiced to hear the account you have rendered me of yourself—for it proves that the one fault has indeed been atoned for!"

"And, Oh, my lord!" resumed Mrs. De Vere, "in return for all the friendship which you have displayed towards me, my heart has ever cherished the sincerest gratitude! I have a few more observations to make. A little time ago Lord Mendlesham procured for Charles an appointment in a Government office; and this circumstance

compelled us to leave our rural home in Leicestershire and settle in the British metropolis. Accident led us to fix our abode at Belmont Cottage, which chanced to be in the immediate vicinity of Sidney Villa. The instant I heard the name of Evelyn, and learnt that she was your daughter, I became deeply, deeply interested in her. I resolved to keep my eye upon her, and to watch over her welfare, for *your* sake. Yet I did not choose to court her acquaintance: I was diffident in forming an intimacy with the daughter of the very man who had rescued me from the streets! I remembered from what a pitch of degradation you had lifted me up; and I thought to myself, 'If by any possibility Morton Evelyn should not be really dead, and if he should ever come back, he might look with indignation upon me if he thought that I had obtruded myself upon the notice of his pure-minded, chaste, and virtuous daughter!'—But as I have already told you, I conceived the utmost interest on behalf of Agnes Evelyn; and when I learnt that the Hon. Hector Hardress had accidentally become acquainted with her and purposed to call at Sydney Villa——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Ormsby, "I know what you are about to state. You wrote Agnes a letter of warning, and you signed it *An Unknown Friend*."

"Yes: such was the step that I took," replied Mrs. De Vere.

"Agnes, when telling me all the incidents of her life," said Ormsby, "failed not to mention this one. It was very kind on your part, Mrs. De Vere; and this day has shown you that Morton Evelyn *does* live to thank you for the interest you took in his daughter!"

"Oh, but consider the illimitable obligations under which I lie towards you!" exclaimed Mrs. De Vere; "and then speak not of thanks to me. But, Ah! what was that which poor Charles told me just now?"

"It is with the profoundest sorrow, Mrs. De Vere," replied Ormsby, "that I have to repeat to you the same declaration which I ere now made to your son. Everything is at an end between him and Agnes; and, Oh! it is indeed fortunate that you should have come to Florence to look after him, for I fear that he has formed a connexion——"

"What, my lord!" ejaculated Mrs. De Vere, becoming pale as death; "Charles has formed an improper connexion? Oh, no! it is impossible! You must be labouring under some tremendous error! What! Charles do ought that is wrong? Oh, no! no! I will believe almost anything rather than *that*! Depend upon it, you are mistaken!"

"It is a sad thing for me, Mrs. De Vere," said Ormsby, "to become the means of creating any unpleasant feeling between yourself and your son—still more unpleasant to me to stretch forth my hand and tear away from your eyes the bandage which has hitherto covered it in reference to the conduct of Charles. But if you press me on the point——"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, explain yourself!" cried Mrs. De Vere. "If *after* our meeting to-day you had bidden Charles consider that everything was at an end betwixt him and Agnes, I should have naturally considered that it was because you would not consent to bestow the hand of your

daughter upon a youth of illegitimate birth. But inasmuch——"

"Mrs. De Vere," interrupted the nobleman, "I am utterly devoid of such pride or such prejudice—aye, and incapable, too, of such monstrous injustice! I tell you that your son is not worthy of all the eulogiums which you in your maternal fondness might naturally be inclined to pass upon him; and it pains me to add that he assuredly is not worthy of espousing my daughter. I am grieved—Oh! I am grieved, because I had thought so well of him, and I know that Agnes loves him—yes, fondly, dearly loves him; and therefore the blow for her will be terrible to a degree! And yet that blow must be inflicted. There is no alternative!"

"But the crime—the crime which Charles has committed?" exclaimed Mrs. De Vere, in a perfect state of mental agony.

"Alas," rejoined Ormsby, "under the mask of friendship he seduced the beautiful quadroon wife of his friend Gustavus Barrington—and she is living as a mistress under his protection!"

Again did Mrs. De Vere become as pale as death; for the accusation was delivered with a mingled sadness and solemnity which gave it all the force of truthfulness; and the unfortunate mother was shocked, confounded, almost annihilated by the intelligence. A letter which Charles had written to her, explaining the reasons of his protracted sojourn in Florence, had happened to miscarry: she had become alarmed on his account, when hearing of all the terrible things which had occurred in reference to Lucrezia di Mirano; and so she had set off from Naples to seek her son in the Tuscan capital. Now, therefore, on hearing that accusation from Lord Ormsby's lips, she was smitten with the idea that her son's silence might have been occasioned by that very guiltiness of conduct wherewith he was now charged; and thus her strong maternal faith in the rectitude of her beloved boy received an immense shock.

"Again I declare, my dear madam," said Lord Ormsby, "that it grieves me sorely to communicate unpleasant tidings in reference to your son: but it is not my fault. I now leave you—and rest assured that no one will rejoice more unfeignedly than I, to hear that by your good advice you may have brought back your son into the path of rectitude and prudence. Farewell, madam—and may Charles yet be everything that you could wish him!"

Lord Ormsby pressed Mrs. De Vere's hand with friendly warmth; and then he hurried from the apartment. Traversing the ante-room, he reached the staircase, and descended into the court-yard of the hotel. There he beheld Charles pacing to and fro with agitated steps; and the instant our hero caught sight of the nobleman, he flew towards him.

"Now, my lord," he cried, "what is your decision? Is it to revoke the sentence so severe——"

"Your mother awaits you, young man," answered Ormsby. "Go to her at once: she will give you explanations."

Thereupon Lord Ormsby hastily quitted the hotel, while Charles rushed up-stairs to his mother. But there was a terrible alarm in his heart, inasmuch as he could not conceal from himself that

there was naught encouraging in the tone and look of the nobleman from whom he had just parted.

"Mother, tell me," he cried, as he rushed into her presence, "am I to learn the worst?"

"Yes—the worst," responded Mrs. De Vere, whose demeanour was half sad, half angry. "By your own folly and wickedness——"

"Oh, but this is too much!" cried Charles, half frantic. "What! you likewise accuse me? you, my mother? Oh, then there is at least one to whose sense of justice I will appeal!"—and he rushed towards the door.

"Stop, stop! I command you, Charles!" cried Mrs. De Vere. "Whither are you going? to whom will you appeal?"

"To Agnes herself!"—and the next instant Charles disappeared from the view of his mother.

She flew after him: but tripping over a footstool, she fell heavily—her forehead came in violent concussion with the edge of a table—and she was deprived of consciousness.

Let us now return to Lord Ormsby—who, on quitting the hotel, was pursuing his way towards his own quarters, when all of a sudden some one ejaculated, "Ah, Mr. Hargrave!"—and Gustavus Barrington bounded towards him.

"What! is it possible?" exclaimed the young man: "we meet in Florence! What on earth are you doing here? It cannot be that in your kindness you have come to search after me——"

"Not exactly—and yet it is well that we have met," responded Ormsby. "Have you received any particular intelligence relative to Mr. Pincock?"

"Yes—that he is ill."

"He is dead," rejoined Ormsby. "Yes, dead!—and he has left all his fortune to—to—your wife."

"Dead?" said Gustavus: "that kind-hearted, hospitable gentleman dead!"—and the tears started from his eyes. "But does Emily know this?"

"I think that by this time she does," responded Ormsby; "for I took some measures to ensure the conveyance of the intelligence to her."

"Oh, I must go and see Charles De Vere at once!" cried Gustavus. "An event so serious—so important——"

"Charles De Vere?" ejaculated Lord Ormsby, in astonishment. "Do you mean that you see Charles De Vere?—is it possible that you can meet him under existing circumstances?"

It was the turn of Gustavus Barrington to gaze upon Lord Ormsby with surprise; and he said, "Why should I not meet Charles De Vere? He is one of the kindest friends I ever had?"

The nobleman started. What could he think? Either that Gustavus was hoodwinked as to the real state of affairs; or else that he was a willing accessory to his own dishonour, and that he was now hypocritically affecting to be ignorant thereof. However, that he might proceed cautiously and guardedly, the nobleman said, "Perhaps you would explain the circumstances under which you are still tarrying at Florence, and why the very instant a serious piece of intelligence is communicated to you, you think of rushing off to Mr. De Vere?"

"Ah, my dear Mr. Hargrave," said Gustavus, "from you I can have no secrets! You know all

about my sojourn in Jamaica and the circumstances connected with my marriage—you even warned me against an alliance with Emily—you are cognizant of her behaviour in respect to the document which so vitally concerned the interests of my poor old grandfather—”

“And therefore,” interjected Ormsby, who guessed what was coming, “you will now admit me completely into your confidence and tell me what has occurred?”

“Emily has led me the most wretched of lives,” pursued Gustavus: “she has sought to usurp a stupendous empire over me by enthralling me in bonds more fatal than those which the wiles of Dalilah wove for the infatuated Sampson. She plunged me into a vortex of dissipation, in order that luxurious pleasures might render me her slave. I have both loved and hated her. Oh, it was impossible to escape altogether from the impression which that love of hers so frenetic and so strange—so wild and so ardent—was naturally calculated to make upon my soul! And thus perhaps I should have continued captive in the bonds which she had cast around me, if circumstances had not suddenly transpired to turn all my thoughts and ideas into a new channel—to make me a man once more—to raise me up from the grovelling position of a dissipated voluptuary, and lead me to think of the various duties that I owed to society, to myself, and to others! Then a terrible scene took place between us at the hotel where we put up in Florence,—a scene upon the details of which I will not dwell. Suffice it to say that it was more than man could endure—and I separated from her!”

“Ah! you separated from her?” said Lord Ormsby. “And what followed?”

“Knowing how generous-hearted and high-principled was Charles De Vere,” pursued Gustavus, “I resolved to consult him. I had no other friend in Florence,—and, Oh! I felt the necessity of being well advised in such circumstances. I merely wished to separate from Emily for a period, that she might have leisure to reflect upon the whole tenour of her conduct towards me, and make up her mind to the pursuance of a different course. I implored De Vere to act as a mediator—and he consented. I proposed that Emily should go to Jamaica to attend upon her father, while I proceeded to England to sojourn awhile in the society of my cousin Winifred and her husband. Emily demanded time to reflect upon the proposal; and she likewise insisted upon being removed from the hotel into private lodgings. I begged De Vere to see that this was done, and to escort her to her new abode—”

“You begged him to do this?” said Ormsby, who felt as if a mist were beginning to clear away from before his eyes.

“Yes—for I knew that in De Vere both Emily and myself had a staunch friend who would act impartially between us. And now, to be brief, an entire week has passed away—and day after day, therefore, have I been compelled to request De Vere to call upon her—to reason with her—to remonstrate—to entreat that she will be reasonable—or even to threaten her if she refused; and painful though to him the task has been, yet has he fulfilled it. Yes—painful indeed!—for he has experienced scenes of violence with Emily—

eye, and on the other hand, he has also been fearful lest her reputation should suffer by these continued visits on the part of a young man who was in no way related to her.”

“He has told you all this?” asked Lord Ormsby.

“Yes,” rejoined Gustavus; “and I owe him a thousand obligations. Ah! I remember, on one occasion Emily endeavoured to cajole him over to her own interests; she caught him by the hand, and at that moment the landlady’s daughter entered the room. An equivocal interpretation might possibly have been put upon the scene; and De Vere’s virtuous spirit revolted against it. He therefore represented to me how painful and inconvenient his position was becoming—”

“Is it all so?” ejaculated Ormsby.

“Good heavens, Mr. Hargrave!” cried Gustavus, “you seem to doubt it? Why should you do so? Oh! believe me there exists not a nobler character than Charles De Vere!—and it is not his fault if everything yet remains most unsatisfactory and unsettled in reference to my wife. Perhaps you will accuse me of weakness, but I could not possibly leave Florence while she is in such a frame of mind. It is a sort of madness: and when I know that it all springs from the illimitable love which she bears for me, I experience a certain degree of pity—yes, a sympathy and a commiseration, which would not suffer me to quit Florence until something definitive shall have been settled.”

“What does your wife require?” demanded Ormsby.

“That we should live together again, without any interval of separation,” rejoined Gustavus. “Her incessantly reiterated stipulation is that we should meet and discuss our differences together without the aid of an intermediary. But to this I will not assent. To tell you the truth, Mr. Hargrave, there are certain reasons which not merely make me tremble for my own life, but also dread lest she should lay violent hands upon herself. Thus I dare not meet her—neither dare I abandon her in Florence amongst strangers; for I cannot forget that with all her faults she is my wife, and that perhaps the greatest of those faults is that of loving me too devotedly and too well! Oh, if you would interest yourself in our behalf!—for I dare no longer expect that Charles De Vere will consent to encounter such painful scenes—”

“Oh, how I have wronged him! how I have wronged him!” ejaculated Ormsby.

“Wronged him?” echoed Gustavus, in astonishment. “What on earth do you mean? To wrong Charles De Vere would be the greatest of crimes!”

“Come quick! come quick!” exclaimed the nobleman: “let us hasten to his hotel! let me clasp him in my arms, as if he were my own very dear son! let me tell him that Agnes shall be his bride!”

Gustavus was amazed at this gush of words which poured forth from the other’s lips; and following the track of his rapid footsteps, he inquired, “Good heavens! what does all this mean? and what have you been saying to Charles De Vere?”

“I have misjudged him in every sense!” ejaculated Ormsby. “There have been misrepresenta-

tions and errors!—particular circumstances have created the falsest impressions! But come, and you shall see how everything will be cleared up!"

In a few minutes they reached the hotel; and Lord Ormsby at once led the way up to the apartments where he had so recently separated from her hero's mother. He opened the door of the inner room, Gustavus following him closely. At the first glance they beheld no one: but the next moment ejaculations of alarm burst from the lips of both as their eyes settled upon the prostrate form of a female upon the floor.

This was Mrs. De Vere. They raised her:—she was in a state of unconsciousness, and the blood was trickling from a wound in the forehead. Water was sprinkled upon her face, and she soon began to recover.

"Ah, my lord!" she said, as she slowly opened her eyes; "is it a horrible dream? Yes!—methought you had forbidden Charles from thinking any more of your daughter as his future bride—"

"Good heavens, who are you, Mr. Hargrave?" cried Gustavus, in the most bewildering astonishment. "Your daughter? That means Agnes Evelyn! And you therefore—"

"Yes, Gustavus—yes," said the nobleman; "you have now learnt my secret—but it need be no longer a secret from you! Mrs. De Vere, this is Mr. Barrington. Your son has been fearfully misjudged—he is innocent—he is the virtuous and well-principled young man you ever took him to be. Where is he?"

"Where is he? Oh!"—and Mrs. De Vere pressed her hand to her brow. "He is gone! gone!"

"Gone?" echoed both Ormsby and Gustavus. "Whither is he gone?"

"He said that there was yet one to whom he could appeal," rejoined Mrs. De Vere; "and he fled—Oh! I remember it all now! And my language towards him was so angry and severe!"

At this instant the door opened and the quadroom burst into the apartment. She flung up her veil at the same moment; and her eyes flashed strange fires as she bent her glances upon her husband, exclaiming, "At length we meet! and it is to part no more! You will come with me. What! Mr. Hargrave?"

"Mrs. Barrington, permit me," interjected Ormsby, "to have a few words of private conversation with you. This lady is the mother of Mr. De Vere. You see that she is ill—wounded—suffering—"

"Gustavus," said Emily, turning impatiently from Ormsby, "will you come with me—yes or no?"

"For heaven's sake hear reason!" said Gustavus.

"Tis you who must hear reason!" cried the quadroom. "Listen! It is now my turn to make propositions. My father is dead—and I inherit his immense fortune. You may give your own wealth to your cousin and her husband, if you will: I agree to it—I recommend it. But come you with me to Jamaica, and I make you the master of all my own riches."

"Mrs. Barrington," said Ormsby, "I beg and entreat that you will grant me a few minutes in private."

"Not a minute! not a moment! not a second!" ejaculated the quadroom, sending the lightning of her looks flashing fiercely upon the nobleman. "I want nobody to interfere betwixt me and my husband. There has been already too much of all this mediation on the part of Mr. De Vere. I am wearied of it! Gustavus, let your decision be promptly given—yes or no?"

"I owe it to myself, Emily," replied young Barrington, with firm tone and decisive look, "to act the dignified part of a husband and of a man. I will no longer be your slave. I will not bend to your caprices: I will not yield to your imperiousness. My answer therefore is that I will not go to Jamaica until I shall have visited England, to attend to my own affairs and to congratulate my cousin on her marriage—aye, and also to drop a tear upon the tomb of my deceased grandsire!"

"Reflect well, Gustavus," said Emily. "Reflect well," she repeated, in a still more sombre tone than at first, and with a more sinister light flashing in her eyes.

"Emily! Emily!" ejaculated her husband; "why—why do everything you can to enlarge the gulf that is open between us, instead of doing your best to bridge it?"

"Once for all, Gustavus," said the quadroom,—

"once for all, will you come—yes or nay?"

"No," he responded, firmly and decisively.

She turned abruptly round; and the impression of the others was that she was about to pass rapidly away from them. But her hands clutched certain objects which she had hidden beneath her garments; and as she suddenly faced about again, she appeared with a pistol in her right hand and a small phial in her left.

"Then we die together!" she ejaculated: and at the same instant she discharged the pistol which she levelled point blank at her husband.

Gustavus bounded forward and fell headlong upon the floor. Mrs. De Vere shrieked—and Ormsby rushed towards the quadroom to snatch the phial from her hand. But in a moment she tossed the pistol away from her—she raised the phial to her lips—swallowed the contents—and then with a wild exultant cry flung the bottle upon the floor.

"Wretched woman! what have you done?" exclaimed Ormsby: but these words were instantaneously followed by a cry of joy as he beheld Gustavus Barrington spring up to his feet, for he had merely tripped over the very same footstool which had ere now thrown down Mrs. De Vere.

"Emily!" he exclaimed, "would you have murdered your own husband?"

A shriek pealed from her lips, as her dismayed looks were swept over the form of Gustavus, and she saw (at least as far as she could judge) that he was not even so much as wounded.

"You live! you live!" she cried: "you live to mock me?—and I die poisoned! Oh, my God!"

"Poisoned?" echoed Mrs. De Vere, with a scream. "Let assistance be summoned!"

"Fear nothing, madam!" interrupted Gustavus: "there was no bullet in the pistol, and the contents of that phial were of the most harmless description!"

"Say you so?" cried the quadroom: and hasten-

ing to pick up the bottle, she added, "No, no! he is deceiving you! He lives—and I die!"

Thus speaking, the quadroon made one bound towards the spot where she had flung down the pistol: but Lord Ormsby was beforehand with her—and he snatched it up.

"It is useless to give yourself any trouble, my lord," said Gustavus, "concerning that weapon. It is a revolver, as I perceive—but the remaining barrels are as harmlessly charged as the one which has been fired off. As for you, Emily, it is an innocent drug which you have swallowed: but your twofold crime is not the less because heaven has frustrated you in its execution!"

The quadroon stared upon her husband with her large burning eyes; and it was evident that she was utterly bewildered what to think or how to act.

"Your proceedings have been watched, Emily," continued Gustavus; "and fortunate it is that such precautions were taken, or else murder and suicide would ere now have been the horrible termination of the scene! Yes—you were watched and followed the other night when you visited the gunsmith's, and subsequently the chemist's! At the former place you purchased a revolver-pistol, which you made the man load in your own presence: yes—you saw that he duly charged each barrel with a bullet! At the other place you purchased poison. But Catrina Petraro was on your track; and subsequently she purchased a similar pistol at the same gunsmith's, and a similar phial of fluid at the chemist's. The pistol she ordered to be charged with powder only; and into the phial she ordered some simple mixture to be poured. This weapon and this phial were substituted for the articles which you yourself had purchased, and which you had placed in a bureau. Thus, thanks to these precautions, my life has been rescued from your murderous aims, and you still live to repent of your misdeeds!"

It was with an inscrutable expression of countenance that the quadroon listened to this speech; and when it was finished, she still stood motionless in the midst of the apartment, her burning eyes fixed upon her husband.

"I think, Mrs. Barrington," said Lord Ormsby, "that after the scene which has just occurred, you cannot fail to recognise the prudence and propriety of separating from your husband for a time——"

"Yes—be it so!" she abruptly ejaculated. "I now wish it! I now desire it! Go you to England, Gustavus. I shall at once set off for France, and at Havre I shall embark for the West Indies. When we meet again you will appreciate all the fond love that has been borne for you by your Emily!"

With these words, she abruptly quitted the room, closing the door behind her. Gustavus sprang a couple of paces forward as if to follow her—and then stopping short, he said with an air of bewildered uncertainty, "I know not whether to let her depart thus and abandon her to her own wild will—or whether to try for the last time the effects of friendly remonstrance and persuasion?"

He glanced towards Lord Ormsby, as if appealing to him for advice, and suffering the nobleman to comprehend that one word from his lips would decide him how to act. But Ormsby saw that it

was a subject too delicate for him to interfere with: it was a point to be cleared up only by him whom it most vitally concerned.

"No," said Gustavus, suddenly making up his mind: "I will not seek her presence again! 'Tis better that everything should be at an end between us!"

"And now," exclaimed Mrs. De Vere, "what about Charles? Who will go to seek him?"

"One minute, my dear madam, and I will return!" said Lord Ormsby: and he hastened to the room.

Mrs. De Vere resumed her seat upon the sofa, where she abandoned herself to her painful reflections in reference to the abrupt departure of her son; while Gustavus, throwing himself upon an ottoman in the window-recess, gave way to his meditations in respect to Emily.

In a few minutes Lord Ormsby returned; and he said, "There can be no doubt, my dear madam, that Charles has quitted Florence. But I have penned a hasty note and sent a courier in pursuit of him. In that billet I have told him that everything is satisfactorily cleared up—and I have begged him to come back. Doubtless he will be overtaken! At all events, if it should be otherwise, we shall know where to find him. He will proceed to England——"

"Yes!" exclaimed Mrs. De Vere: "but, Oh! conceive the agony of soul he will endure!—the painful affliction and cruel suspense until everything shall be cleared up! And if in such a frame of mind he should seek Agnes, most cruelly will he afflict her likewise!"

"True! true!" said Ormsby: "but let us hope that the courier will succeed in overtaking him."

"By what means did he depart?" inquired Mrs. De Vere.

"It would seem," replied Lord Ormsby, "that rushing down into the court-yard, he demanded how soon he could have an equipage got in readiness to take him on a long journey. At that very moment a courier was about to start with a post-horse—Charles saw the animal waiting in the court-yard—he at once hired it—the courier surrendered it to him—and he galloped away."

"Ah, then, my poor son is half-frantic!" cried Mrs. De Vere in an agony of grief; "and there is not even a certainty in respect to the particular route that he may take!"

"Tranquillise yourself, my dear madam," said Lord Ormsby. "I have done all that can be accomplished under existing circumstances—and we must await the result in patience."

CHAPTER XLII.

TURIN.

The scene now changes to the city of Turin, the capital of the Kingdom of Piedmont. It was evening—and the principal theatre was thronged with the *élite* of the fashionable world of that beautiful metropolis, to witness the *début* of some new actress. From the moment that the doors were opened the crowds began to pour in; so that the seats speedily filled. But there was one box which remained completely unoccupied even till



the moment when the curtain drew up and the first scene had commenced,—when the door of that box opened and a lady entered. She was alone: but this circumstance being by no means unusual on the Continent, did not excite any particular attention on the part of those who bent their eyes in that direction to contemplate this lady. And few there were within the walls of that theatre whose attention was not attracted from the stage to this lovely occupant of that box; and for several moments there was a sound resembling a suppressed buzz of admiration—for the great beauty of that lady at once produced a marvellous effect.

"Who is she?" inquired at least a hundred whispering voices in different parts of the house.

No one could answer the question: she was a stranger: she had not been before seen in any public place at Turin.

"What magnificent raven hair!" said an

attaché of the Austrian Legation to a brother-diplomatist.

"And what magnificent dark eyes!" ejaculated the latter: "how luminous and how languishing! how bright and yet how melting!"

"What an admirable figure!" was whispered in another box by an aide-de-camp of the King of Piedmont, to a friend with whom he was seated. "There is the blending of the style of the Hebe with the Sylph—the luxurious proportions of the former being subdued and adjusted, so to speak, by the grace and elegance of the latter! What a beautiful neck! what a superb bust! and yet what a wasp-like waist!"

"And now she smiles," said the other gentleman. "Look! she recognises some one in another box!—and what a display of magnificent teeth! Who can she possibly be?"

"Her toilet is admirable!" observed the aide-

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de-camp; "and she herself has a most distinguished appearance. She is quite young—I should not think that she is above eighteen or nineteen—"

"About nineteen, I should conceive," responded the other; "but assuredly no more. Ah! who are those that are now entering her box,—that gentleman with the moustache, with the pretty light haired girl leaning on his arm?"

"They also are strangers: I never saw them before."

The lady whose entrance into the box had produced such an immense sensation and elicited so many encomiums upon her beauty—some of which by the bye, reached her own ears—was none other than Floribel Lister. She had resolved to create a sensation at Turin—and she succeeded. She had taken a box at the theatre, and she had purposely entered late, so that her triumph—if such we may call it—would be all the more complete by attracting all eyes from the proceedings on the stage and riveting them upon herself. And truly she was wondrously beautiful!—never had she appeared to greater advantage! She was entering as it were from a new starting-point in her career; and assuredly the lustre of her own charms enveloped her as it were with a perfect halo of rapturous dazzling light on this occasion.

As she slowly looked round upon the company, she was suddenly struck on beholding the countenance of Sir Alexander Holcroft; and then still more astonished was she on perceiving the pretty face of Carlotta, the daughter of the governor of the Apennine fortress.

"Ah!" she thought to herself; "Bagno was not strong enough nor sufficiently well barred to prevent young Cupid from helping his votary to effect an escape! But what will Carlotta say to me after the trick that I played her when I accomplished my own escape?"

Sir Alexander bowed with a friendly familiarity to Floribel; and then Carlotta, having exchanged a hasty whisper with her companion, nodded with an expression of countenance which was as much as to imply that she harboured no ill-will towards her former friend and confidante of the fortress. Floribel made them a slight but perceptible sign to join her in her own box; and as they had merely engaged two seats in the front part of the amphitheatre, and were somewhat crowded, they lost not a moment in accepting Floribel's invitation.

To her box they accordingly repaired; and it was with a sly smile, but also with a blush upon the cheeks, that the pretty Carlotta gave her hand to Floribel, at the same time saying, "You behaved very wickedly to me—but I forgive you. Alexander desires it—and besides, I conceived a liking for you from the very first."

"My dear Carlotta," answered Floribel, "I should indeed be very sorry to lose your friendship: I am therefore glad that you have not withdrawn it. Pray be seated."

"By what name are we to know you?" whispered Sir Alexander Holcroft. "Perchance you are no longer the Signora Ciprina?"

"No," responded Floribel. "The name has acquired too great a notoriety in its unfortunate association with the infamous Lucrezia di Mirano."

"Then perhaps you are again Floribel Lister?" said the Baronet, with a smile.

"No. I think you are aware of some reasons which make me wish to lose my identity. I have obtained a new passport, having no farther use for the one you favoured me with in the Apennines; and I am now Flora Lovel."

"And a sweet pretty name it is," said Holcroft. "The initials are still the same—F. L. Then Flora is as sweetly melodious as Floribel; and Lovel is certainly more euphonious than Lister. I will therefore lose no time in whispering to my pretty Carlotta that she is not to know you as the Signora Ciprina, but as an English lady bearing the name of Flora Lovel. Ah! by the bye, is it to be Mrs. Lovel?"

"Assuredly," responded Floribel: and then she added with an arch smile, "I am a widow, of course!—and mind therefore that you thus represent me."

"I shall not fail," answered the Baronet. "You saw what a sensation your presence created, and it will be your own fault if in the course of a very few days you do not have all the noblesse of Turin sighing at your feet."

Sir Alexander Holcroft now whispered a few words to Carlotta; and she said with an amiable smile to Floribel, "I transfer to Madame Flora Lovel the friendship which I experienced for the Signora Ciprina."

"Thanks, my dear friend," was the response. "And so at last you contrived to outwit your father and mother, and the savage Gudulla, and all those lynx-eyed sentinels?"

"Yes—I outwitted them," replied Carlotta: and then she added with a sigh, "But sometimes I think that my poor father and mother must be very unhappy on account of my flight—and—and—I wish I could write and tell them that I am married—but every day something occurs to prevent Alexander from fulfilling the necessary formalities—"

"What is it that you are saying?" asked the Baronet, with a glance of uneasiness at Carlotta and then of significance at Floribel. "You know, my dear girl, that everything will soon be all right. I have faithfully promised you—"

"And after all," said Floribel, "a theatre is not precisely the place to discuss the subject:" but still she could not help experiencing a sentiment of deep compassion for the artless, ingenious young creature whom she knew to have been beguiled by the unprincipled man of the world who had never for a moment intended to make her his wife.

"Where are you staying, my dear Mrs. Lovel?" inquired the Baronet.

"At the Hotel de France," was the reply.

"The Hotel de France?" ejaculated Holcroft: "we also are staying there! But when did you arrive?"

"Only the day before yesterday," answered Floribel. "And you?"

"This evening. And do you purpose to make a long sojourn in Turin?" asked the Baronet. "But perhaps I ought not to put such a question? It may all depend upon circumstances? Is it not so?"

"Yes," rejoined Floribel; and she darted a significant look at Holcroft. "But I am dying," she continued, "to hear how you contrived to effect the escape of my friend Carlotta."

"We will sup together after the performances," replied Holcroft; "and then you shall have the entire history."

Meanwhile the representation was proceeding; the new actress made her *début*, and was completely successful. When the entertainments were over, Floribel, the Baronet, and Carlotta returned to the hotel, where Sir Alexander Holcroft at once ordered supper to be served up in the sitting-room occupied by himself and Carlotta; so that Floribel became their guest. When ample justice had been done to the repast and the champagne had circulated, Floribel reminded the Baronet of his promise to give her the particulars of Carlotta's escape; and he at once prepared to do so.

"You will laugh," he said, "at the adventure which after all constitutes a very appropriate sequence to your own romantic escape by means of the baker's basket."

"You must begin by telling Madame Lovel," said Carlotta, "that after her escape my father was more than ever vigilant throughout the fortress, as well as more than ever particular with regard to myself."

"I hope that you were not accused," interjected Floribel, "of any complicity in my escape?"

"For a moment it seemed as if my father was inclined to suspect me," responded Carlotta, "because it was of course known that I was with you in the chapel. But I told my tale so well—and moreover it was so completely corroborated by Father Falconara himself—that all suspicion was averted from me and was directed towards Gudulla. But she also cleared herself; and thus the whole affair appeared to be enveloped in the deepest mystery. My father was dreadfully frightened; and he sent off the priest Falconara to Florence, to represent everything to the Minister of Police and appease that functionary. Ah! little did we then think that the star of the once all-powerful Count Ramorino was so soon to set!"

"I knew that Father Falconara was in Florence," observed Floribel; "for Mr. De Vere saw him there."

"And now," said Sir Alexander Holcroft, "I may enter upon the explanations which you have requested me to give. After I had separated from you, Mrs. Lovel, on that day when I consigned you to the care of the Hardreas family, I went back to the town of Bagno, wondering what on earth I was to do in order to effect the escape of my pretty Carlotta. I devised a thousand schemes, but was compelled to reject them all one after another. I could not even induce either of the bakers' men to become the bearer of a letter into the fortress:—they declared that they dreaded lest they themselves should end by becoming prisoners there. I knew not how to act: I was almost reduced to despair. I was even frightened lest Captain Belluno should discover, through the timidity of those journeyman bakers, that I had been carrying on a correspondence with his daughter—in which case he would only have exercised the greater vigilance over her movements. I therefore thought that it would be perhaps more prudent for me to remove out of the neighbourhood, at least for a short period; and even at that moment I had some general idea that I should do well to return in a deep disguise, so that if any

suspicion had been excited against me it might not continue to act prejudicially to my aims."

"You see, my dear Carlotta," said Floribel—for Sir Alexander Holcroft was giving these explanations in Italian,—"you see how resolute he was to overcome all obstacles, and therefore how strong was his affection for you!"

"Yes—I know that he loves me very much," answered the amiable and confiding young lady.

"Well," resumed Sir Alexander Holcroft, "a couple of days after your escape from the fortress, Mrs. Lovel, I took my departure from the town of Bagno. I travelled in a postchaise, attended by my confidential valet, whom you saw on the occasion to which I have ere now alluded—I mean that of your escape. We had journeyed some fourteen or fifteen miles, when on reaching a little hamlet we saw a travelling carriage upset in the middle of the road, and a group of persons gathered about it. An accident of a serious nature had evidently occurred, for some of those persons were bearing the form of a gentleman into the little village hostelry. I drove up to the spot, and learnt that the chariot had upset with considerable violence in consequence of the breaking of the fore-axle, and that the traveller who occupied the vehicle, was most seriously injured. Indeed, he was completely deprived of consciousness; and the village-surgeon, who was upon the spot, had at a first glance expressed his fears that the injury sustained might prove very serious, if not absolutely fatal. I stopped at that hostelry, not merely to change horses, but also to learn some additional particulars in reference to the injured traveller, so that I might render any assistance that was in my power. He had a valet with him, and I proceeded to question this individual. Then, to my surprise, I learnt that the injured traveller was a certain Count of Camerino, with whom I had some slight acquaintance a couple of years ago in Naples. He had been engaged in a political conspiracy; and there were subsequently all kinds of tragical events connected with his wife and son. I now learnt that a free pardon had been granted to the Count of Camerino at the instance of some of his powerful acquaintances, and that he was then on his way to Florence, where he was to meet some very particular friend of his, a certain Marquis of Ortona, who was the bearer of the pardon signed by the King of Naples. Such were the particulars which I learnt from the Count of Camerino's valet; and while we were still conversing together, another postchaise drove up to the door of the hostelry. Who should alight but Father Falconara?"

"Ah! now perhaps your story will begin to connect itself with the circumstances of Carlotta's escape from Bagno?" exclaimed Floribel, with a smile: "for I certainly have been wondering what all these details about the Count of Camerino could possibly have to do with it."

"You shall see," answered the Baronet. "I had some slight knowledge of Father Falconara, and I at once accosted him, inasmuch as I somewhat suspected for what purpose he had been despatched from Bagno to Florence. He told me that terrible things had occurred in the Tuscan capital, for that a certain Marchioness whom Count Ramorino had married (Falconara himself officiating as the priest) had been exposed as a murderess and had perished miserably. He likewise made

me acquainted with the fact that he was charged with certain letters and tidings of importance for Captain Belluno at the Castle of Bagno. It was then his turn to become the querist; and glancing at the upset chariot in the road, he expressed a hope that no one had been injured. It suddenly struck me that his name had been in some way or another mixed up with those tragical affairs at Naples which regarded the Count of Camerino's wife and son; and I hastened to explain that the Count himself was the traveller in the chariot to which the accident had occurred, and that he had been conveyed in a very precarious state into the little wayside inn. On hearing this intelligence, Father Falconara gave vent to an ejaculation of wild grief—and he flew to the chamber where the Count lay. I also proceeded thither. The medical man had by that time ascertained the state of the injury: and he informed us that the skull was severely fractured at its base, and that recovery was therefore next to impossible. Father Falconara displayed the deepest sorrow, declaring that nothing should induce him to abandon his benefactor, except the sense of duty which compelled him to bear safely to Bagno the letters with which he was charged. It appeared from what I gleaned from Falconara's lips, that the Count of Camerino had supplied unto him the place of a perished father. It occurred to me at the moment that by becoming the bearer of those despatches to Captain Belluno at the Castle, I might by some accident or another be enabled to forward my own views in reference to Carlotta. I therefore represented to Father Falconara my willingness to undertake the task; and I bade him reflect that so long as he obtained a trusty messenger in respect to those documents, he need not entertain the punctilious notion that he was neglecting a sacred duty which had been confided to him. He thankfully accepted my proposal: he placed the letters in my hand—and he gave me certain explanations which he requested me to repeat to Captain Belluno. It appeared that when the storm burst above the head of the Count of Ramorino, a new Minister of Police was appointed in the course of a few hours. Father Falconara had waited upon him to explain for what purpose he had come to Florence; and the new Minister had questioned him very closely in reference to the discipline observed in the fortress of Bagno, the number of prisoners who were confined there, their offences, and so forth. From all that Father Falconara said to the new Minister, the latter had expressed his resolution to send, with the least possible delay, an Inspector or Commissioner to visit the castle, and draw up a report of the state of the establishment, with a view to its complete reformation. It was this piece of intelligence which Father Falconara desired me to communicate to Captain Belluno, so that he might not be taken unawares by the appearance of the Inspector or Commissioner."

"And so you undertook the task?" said Floribe; "and by those means you obtained an introduction into the Castle of Bagno?"

"Softly, softly, my dear Mrs. Lovel!" interjected the Baronet: "the raciness of the story is now to come; for I see that you have been impatient over those dry details which formed the indispensable preface. Yes—I undertook the task;

and with the despatches in my pocket and the message in my memory, I resumed my seat in my postchaise to retrace my way to Bagno. But it was not plainly as Sir Alexander Holcroft that I returned thither; I was completely metamorphosed! In the first place I travelled considerably out of my way to reach a town where I knew that I could purchase certain little articles that I required—"

"And what were those articles?" asked Floribel.

"A black wig—a fine pair of moustaches, much larger than my natural ones—and a beard. These were for my own special behoof—"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Floribel: "for what purpose did you require such masquerading accessories?"

"I am now about to explain my purpose and the mode in which I carried it out. Ah! I was going on to observe that I also procured a similar disguise for my valet; and I finally became the purchaser of a third pair of false whiskers, with the accompanying moustaches."

"Three pairs altogether!" cried Floribel.

"Yes. One disguise for myself—one for my valet—and the third to keep in reserve for a special purpose. There was likewise a very pretty little suit of male apparel which I bought; and that was also to be kept in reserve."

"Ah! I think I begin to understand," said Floribel, glancing at Carlotta, who smiled significantly and at the same time blushed with modest confusion. "But pray proceed with your narrative, Sir Alexander."

"You will say," returned the Baronet, "that the scheme which I concocted was one of the boldest and most impudent ever devised, and that it was a perfect wonder it resulted in success. But I must remind you that I speak the Italian language with the fluency and accuracy of a native; and this circumstance constituted the main element of that success. Add to which, I am by no means deficient in brazen hardihood; and you will cease to be so very much surprised that the stratagem should have ended so triumphantly. And now for the explanation. Completely disguised, and attended by my valet, who was equally well disguised, I presented myself at the gate of the Castle of Bagno, desiring to be immediately introduced to the presence of Captain Belluno. The sentinels asked who I was. I showed them the seals of the official despatches whereof I was the bearer. In a few minutes I was in the presence of Captain Belluno. Then I boldly announced myself as an Inspector sent by the new Minister of Police to draw up a report of the state of Bagno Castle. Captain Belluno became all civility and politeness; for it doubtless at once struck him that the tenure of his situation depended upon the nature of the report that I should make. I gave him the despatches from the new Minister of Police; and inasmuch as they ordered certain emendations to be accomplished in the discipline of the place, preparatory to the introduction of other and still more sweeping reforms, they seemed to corroborate me in the story that I had framed, and to confirm my representation that I was an Inspector appointed for this particular business. Captain Belluno at once offered to introduce me to his wife and daughter; and I expressed myself delighted at the proposed honour. I was conducted into an

adjoining room; and then I confess I trembled for a moment through fear that Carlotta might betray everything in the surprise of a sudden recognition."

"Ah! you knew full well," exclaimed Floribel, with an arch look, "that though your disguise of false beard, whiskers, and moustache might deceive the eyes of the parents, yet the truth would be quickly penetrated by the loving regards of the daughter!"

"You may conceive, my dear Madame Lovel," said Carlotta, "how great was my astonishment when at the first glance which I threw upon the guest whom my father was introducing, it struck me that the features were those which were well impressed upon my mind. A second glance, and there was no longer a doubt! How it was that I did not give vent to an ejaculation in the wildness of my surprise, I can now scarcely tell. But you may be sure that my heart beat with the most violent palpitations."

"I need not dwell at very great length upon the rest of the narrative," resumed Sir Alexander Holcroft. "In my capacity of Inspecting Commissioner on behalf of his Excellency the new Minister of Police, it was easy for me to create so much bustle, activity, and even confusion, that while Captain Belluno was hastening in one direction and his wife was speeding in another, my faithful and cunning valet found an opportunity to furnish Carlotta with the articles which we had brought for her own special use. Then, in order to prepare the way for the final carrying-out of my project, I desired that all the soldiers of the garrison should be marshalled before me in the court-yard,—well knowing that when the inspection was over, the sentinels who had previously been stationed at the gates would not be sent back to mount guard, but would be succeeded by others. In a little while I received from my valet a hint that everything was all right in respect to the Signora Carlotta. The moment for striking the grand blow was therefore approaching. I sought Captain Belluno; and I said to him, 'As it is my purpose to remain here for the present, I will thank you to write me a pass to enable my two dependants to go in and out of the fortress at their discretion.'—The Captain had only seen me with one attendant; he did not however know but that I might have been followed by a couple—and he was too cringingly polite to ask any questions. So the pass was quickly made out, and in a very few minutes it was in the hands of my valet. Then I got the Captain away to a distant compartment of the fortress—while his wife, the Signora Belluno, was busying herself in the store-rooms, collecting certain statistical details for which I had especially inquired. In the meanwhile Carlotta had put on the disguise furnished for her use—that elegant little suit of male raiment to which I have alluded: her cheeks were embellished with a sweet pair of auburn whiskers—and her upper lip was graced with a moustache about a shade darker. Thus prepared for the venture, she joined my valet, who was anxiously awaiting her on the landing just outside the Governor's suite of apartments. They descended the staircase; but as they entered the vestibule, they found themselves face to face with the female turnkey, Gudulla."

"I might have been stricken down with a

straw," interjected Carlotta; "for I knew that the woman possessed the eyes of a lynx, and that ever since the mysterious escape of yourself, dear madame, the faculties of all her senses had been more keen than ever. Sir Alexander's valet at once displayed the written order to the nearest sentinel; and by this presence of mind on his part, he diverted Gudulla's attention from me. I passed on: Gudulla was evidently satisfied—and the next instant the valet was again by my side. Without any farther cause of alarm we passed out of the fortress; for the sentinels who were then at the gates did not know that the pretended Inspector had only arrived with one valet."

"I was not long in joining them," added Sir Alexander Holcroft: "the postchaise was waiting in the very same spot where it recently served your purpose, Mrs. Lovel—and we were soon across the frontier into the Roman territory. And now you have learnt the entire history of that series of adventures which I just now represented as a worthy sequence to the romantic circumstances of your own escape."

"You certainly deserve immense credit," rejoined Floribel, "for the ingenuity of the scheme, as well as for the boldness with which it was executed."

She then took leave of Sir Alexander Holcroft and Carlotta, and retired to her own chamber, where the faithful Antonia was waiting to assist in the night-toilet of her mistress.

CHAPTER XLIII.

FLORIBEL AND HER VISITORS.

FLORIBEL slept till a late hour in the morning, for it was past two o'clock when she had retired to rest. When she awoke, she reviewed all the incidents of the preceding evening,—the immense sensation her presence had created at the theatre being the principal subject on which her thoughts dwelt. She had not failed to notice how one of the royal sides-de-camps had been particularly smitten by her beauty; and as he was an exceedingly handsome young man, with an appearance at once distinguished and elegant, she felt that she should be by no means displeased to receive some overture from that quarter.

She was reclining in her couch, abandoning herself to these reflections,—the expression of her features catching a tinge of voluptuousness from the nature of the reflections themselves, and her soowy bosom softly palpitating,—when the door gently opened. She thought that it was Antonia who was entering the chamber; and she did not even turn her eyes in that direction. But at the expiration of nearly a minute she began to think it strange that Antonia did not give utterance to a word, nor yet move away from the vicinage of the door; and she accordingly looked round. Then an ejaculation burst from her lips; for a man had penetrated into her apartment—and there he stood, devouring with his eyes the beautiful spectacle which was indeed only too well calculated to rivet his regards! This daring intruder was none other than Hector Hardress; and Floribel immediately recognised him.

"What are you doing here, sir?" she demanded, at once concealing her bust from his view.

"Oh, Floribel! lovely Floribel!" he exclaimed, rushing towards the couch: "pardon my boldness!—be not angry with me!—attribute it all to the passion with which you have inspired me!"

"Depart, sir! leave the room!" she ejaculated with vehemence and passion.

"Oh, Floribel! I beseech you to hear me!" cried Hector. "I have travelled all this distance on purpose——"

"Mr. Hardress, I beseech you to leave me!" she said, her tone and manner suddenly becoming more entreating than angry. "You will compromise me most seriously with the proprietor of this hotel—for he and his wife are most respectable persons! Come to me, if you will, presently——"

"I will come presently!" said Hector. "At what hour may I present myself?"

"Come to me at three o'clock," rejoined Floribel. "I will take care to be alone."

"A thousand, thousand thanks!" ejaculated Hardress: and he stole forth from the chamber.

"The conceited coxcomb!" mentally exclaimed Floribel, the instant he had left her: "to think that he only had to make an overture in order to win me! Ah, I must teach him a lesson!"

In a few minutes Antonia made her appearance; and Floribel's morning toilet commenced. She dressed herself in an elegant *negligé*, which set off her beautiful person to the utmost advantage; for she had a presentiment that the forenoon would not pass away without witnessing some results of her captivating appearance at the theatre on the preceding evening. She received Sir Alexander Holcroft and Carlotta for about half-an-hour; and then she remained alone. But not long did she thus continue alone ere the waiter brought up a card bearing the name of Captain St. Didier, aide-de-camp to his Majesty the King of Piedmont. Floribel's heart leapt within her: but without the slightest exterior betrayal of emotion, she said, "Show Captain St. Didier up."

In a few moments the handsome and elegant aide-de-camp was in her presence. He inclined his head courteously and respectfully, and began by saying, "I ask a thousand pardons, madame, for the boldness of which I have been guilty: but——"

"Be seated, sir," interrupted Floribel, with mingled amiability and formality; and she indicated a chair. "You were going to observe, Captain St. Didier——"

"That it was impossible to behold your appearance at the theatre last evening without being ravished by your presence!"—and the Captain displayed a very handsome set of teeth beneath the cable and glossy line which bowed his upper lip.

"And is it simply to tell me this," inquired Floribel, smiling half archly and half ironically, "that you have taken the trouble to come hither?"

"Be pleased to remember, madame," said the young officer, "that a moth flutters about the most brilliant light until, dazzled and blinded, it becomes scorched by the very flames which constituted the glory of its admiration; and you would not blame, but you would pity the poor creature I pray you to have a similar mercy upon me."

Floribel could not help smiling at this compli-

ment which only a foreigner could turn so exquisitely as to disassociate it utterly from mere gross fulsome-ness; and this time that smile was completely amiable, and by no means scornful.

"I know not who you are, madame," continued Captain St. Didier, "nor whether you purpose to make a long sojourn in Turin: but on this latter point I may venture to express the hope that it will be a long one. And now I must again implore your forgiveness for thus intruding upon you. Will you deal frankly with me?"

"This is a strange question to put," answered Floribel, "to a lady unto whom you are almost completely a stranger, and after our acquaintance has lasted"—she glanced at her watch—"precisely eight minutes."

"There are sentiments which come suddenly upon men," responded the officer, "and make them bold. This constitutes their apology, and it is most humbly offered in my case."

"But why should you beg me to deal with you in frankness and candour?" asked Floribel. "Surely you cannot suppose that I am accustomed to deal otherwise towards persons with whom I come in contact?"

"Oh! permit me to explain myself at once!" exclaimed St. Didier. "Do you believe in love at first sight? If not, believe in it *now!*—for I swear to you that it exists—it is no mere dream of the poet—it is a substantial fact—and I am a living evidence!"

Floribel trembled with a joyous sensation; for, as we have already informed the reader, she was attracted towards this young man; and though the image of Edgar Marcellin was far—very far, from being banished from her mind, yet she felt the necessity of loving and being beloved, though it might be a love after her own fashion. St. Didier saw that quiver of pleasure which thus for a moment agitated her; and emboldened by the circumstance, he exclaimed, "Oh, if you could but accept this humble but sincere offering of my love, how happy would you render me! Ah, you do not say No; and if you meant me to understand that there is no hope, you would not trifle with me—you would tell me so in a moment. May I, then, hope?"

"You think," said Floribel, "that because I am here alone—with no father, nor husband, nor brother—I am one to whom such language as this may be addressed; for I am not foolish enough to suppose that it is an offer of marriage that you are making me. A man takes a wife only when he has known her for weeks—perhaps for years—and has thoroughly studied her disposition and temper: but when he seeks a mistress, it is sufficient for him to see that a woman is beautiful—and he speaks out!"

"Frankly will I reply," said the handsome aide-de-camp, "that I offer you a love which is to be unshackled and untrammelled by any other bonds than those which are merely conventional."

"And now, with equal frankness," Captain St. Didier, answered Floribel, "I will confess to you that I seek to be loved on such terms. It is my purpose to lead a life of pleasure. Pleasure is my motto: I am its personification:—it is almost my name! Neither will I conceal from you that I have been smitten by your engaging appearance——"

"Oh, then there is hope!" ejaculated the handsome young soldier with enthusiastic accents; and falling upon one knee, he seized Floribel's hand and pressed it to his lips.

She suffered that hand to linger in his pressure for a few moments; and then gently withdrawing it, she said in a subdued voice, with a blush upon her cheeks, and with languishing looks, "I think that I could accept such love as yours. But rise! rise! Some one may enter the apartment!"

St. Didier rose accordingly; and as he resumed his seat, he said, "It is but right and proper that I should acquaint you with my exact position. I am by no means rich: nevertheless I am not very poor. I can maintain you in comfort—but not in luxury. I can keep for you a modest equipage—but not a train of gaudily-apparelled domestics. A beautiful little villa in the suburbs—a garden—"

"Say no more, Captain St. Didier!" interrupted Floribel: "you have in delicate terms told me as much as if you had presented to my view a complete balance-sheet of your resources. Leave me now—and to-morrow you shall hear from me."

The handsome young aide-de-camp again pressed Floribel's hand to his lips; and bending upon her a look of manly love and tenderness, he quitted the apartment. When he was gone she sat thinking upon all that had passed between them, until at the expiration of about a quarter of an hour,—when the waiter again entered the room, bearing another card upon a salver. It bore the name of the Baron von Friedburgh, *Attaché* to the Austrian Embassy. Floribel hesitated for a few moments; and then she said, "Let this gentleman be admitted."

The Baron made his appearance. He was about five-and-thirty years of age—tall, and somewhat corpulent—with sandy red hair—a rather puffy face—no whiskers—but a very thick moustache, and a long imperial on his chin. He was elegantly dressed; but his apparel could not conceal the partial gainfulness of his form;—and truth compels us to add that as he crossed the threshold, Floribel experienced a sensation of mingled perfume and cigars.

"I have the honour to salute you most humbly, madame," began the visitor; and yet there was more hauteur and self-sufficiency than humility and courtesy in his address.

"And pray, sir," inquired Floribel, rising from the sofa, and without asking the Baron to be seated, "what may be your business with me?"

"I am a man of a few words, madame," responded the Baron von Friedburgh; "and I shall therefore come to the point at once. I saw you last night at the theatre—and I admired you. I am married—but my wife has a lover, and I am accustomed to have a mistress. Three days ago I quarrelled with the lady who had lived with me for two years—and we separated. I allowed her a fine house—a handsome equipage—and a good income. She was therefore ungrateful, as you will allow."

"And pray, sir," asked Floribel, who still remained standing and did not offer the Baron a seat, "may I beg to be informed of the reason which has induced you to think that I can be in any way interested in your affairs of love and gallantry?"

"Madame, you are an English widow," replied the Austrian, "and your name is Lovel. You are alone in this city; and I do not think that you can wish to continue alone. You may begin to understand the purpose of my visit: but if you do not, you are less shrewd than I took you to be. I will explain myself more fully. Pray be not under any ceremony in my presence!"—and he coolly sat down.

"Oh, I can assure you that I am not!" answered Floribel: and she likewise sat down. "Now, sir, I am all attention."

"In one word, madame," continued the Austrian, "I offer to place you in the position which was occupied until within three days ago by the lady to whom I have referred. There is a house handsomely furnished—there is a very fine equipage—there are servants in the establishment—the cellar is well filled—and in less than an hour there shall be rich plate upon the sideboard and a casket of jewels upon the toilet-table. Of all those elements of happiness you may go and make yourself the mistress."

"I thank you, sir, for your proposal," responded Floribel: "but I cannot give you any answer until to-morrow."

"Be it so, madame," said the Austrian *attaché*. "I will keep the situation open for you for exactly four-and-twenty hours. I have the honour, madame, to salute you most humbly:"—and thus speaking, he bowed and took his departure, without even attempting to enchain a kiss at the fair hand of the beautiful Floribel.

Half-an-hour elapsed, and the waiter again entered the room, bearing another card, with the intimation that "his lordship solicited an interview, but that if Madame Lovel was engaged he would call again at any hour she might think fit to appoint." The card bore the name of the Marquis of Crescentino; and Floribel desired that he might be admitted. She knew nothing of him; and she was wondering what kind of a person he might be, and whether she had happened to notice him on the preceding evening at the theatre, when he was announced.

The Marquis of Crescentino was a man whose age in reality exceeded sixty, though he veritably looked quite twenty years younger. As he entered the apartment with a rapid and elastic step, with an air alike jaunty and elegant, and with an appearance that was both pleasing and distinguished, he struck Floribel to be in the very prime of life. He was somewhat above the medium stature—perfectly upright—and with a figure which seemed to combine lightness and strength. He was elegantly dressed, but with the most perfect good taste; and there was altogether a polish about him which indicated the well-bred man.

Carrying in his hand a beautifully arranged nosegay of the choicest flowers, which diffused a delicious perfume through the apartment, he made a low bow; and placing the bouquet on the table, he said, "Permit me to present my little offering. They are from my own garden: I gathered them myself ere coming hither;—and even in this genial climate, such flowers as these at the close of November are not always to be obtained. Sweets for the sweet and beauties for the beautiful!"—he added, taking up the nosegay again and presenting it to Floribel.

She had risen from her seat, and she accepted the bouquet—for it was proffered with so much well-bred courtesy, and with such an easy elegant respectful gallantry, as to render the donor's manner indescribably winning—we had almost said fascinating.

"Pray be seated, my lord," said Floribel, with an amiable smile, as she indicated a chair.

"Not until I see you sit down first," said the Marquis, with a low bow; and it struck Floribel that his voice was somewhat nervous and trembling for a man who had the hale appearance of about forty years of age.

She sat down; and then the Marquis took a seat likewise.

"I went last night," he pursued, "to witness the *début* of a new actress and the representation of some dramas which are great favourites with me; but I saw neither *débütantes* nor performances. I beheld naught but you."

"Your lordship can speak very pretty flatteries," replied Floribel, "as well as present very pretty nose-gays."

"Truths are not flatteries, my dear madam," rejoined the Marquis; and this time as he bowed, the conviction flashed upon Floribel that the beautiful black curling hair was only a wig most artistically got up. "Your presence last night at the theatre, so sudden and so unexpected," he continued, "came upon me with all the effect of a delightful dream; and when you departed at the close of the performance, it appeared as if darkness had suddenly fallen upon my eyes."

Floribel was just thinking to herself that even though the Marquis wore a wig, he had nevertheless very beautiful teeth, when a slight movement on the part of the entire upper range sent another disagreeable conviction flashing to her mind;—and this was that his teeth were false!

"You cannot be surprised, my dear madame," he continued, "that after your appearance made such an impression on me, I should venture to present myself here to-day. Tell me in one word that my visit is disagreeable—and I depart with a thousand of the humblest apologies for having paid it. But tell me on the other hand that I am not too bold, and you will infuse a perfect rapture into my soul!"

"You come to me, my lord, with so much kindness," replied Floribel, glancing at the beautiful bouquet, "that it is impossible I can say your visit is displeasing. Yet after all it must have an object?"

"It has an object—and it has a hope," responded the Sardinian nobleman. "You are beautiful—and I worship you. Consent to become the idol of this worship—and see with what choice gifts I will enrich the temple that shall enshrine you! There is a spacious mansion not far from hence, bearing the name of the Crescentino Palace. Ten leagues from Turin there is a beautiful country-seat in a park, bearing the name of the Crescentino Chateau. Either is at your disposal: or you may divide your time between both. At each there are numerous equipages and troops of domestics: the former are at your command—the latter would be proud to obey you as their mistress. There is in the next street a banker who will honour your drafts, no matter for what amount;—and there is in your presence an indi-

vidual who will never weary of affording proofs of his devoted love if you will but condescend to accept it!"

While the Marquis of Crescentino was thus speaking Floribel discovered that his whiskers, which at first had seemed to be of a glossy black, were in reality dyed; for they had that peculiar tint which betrays the artificial colouring when the sunbeams fall upon the hair whose natural greyiness is thus disguised. And she furthermore became convinced that the well-fitting coat was skilfully padded so as to set off a figure which age had emaciated; and she perceived that brilliant diamond rings glittered upon wrinkled fingers. In short, as she thus discovered in detail how completely the Marquis was made up, she was gradually led on to the conclusion that instead of a man in the prime of life who was thus entreating her love, it was an old man whose age exceeded sixty. Yet this discovery was accompanied by no sensation of disgust; for, in the first place, it came upon her gradually—and in the second place, his bearing was so gentlemanly, his manners so polished, his demeanour so kind, that if he had presented himself as a friend she would have been quite prepared to take a liking to him. And then too, his person conveyed the idea of the most scrupulous cleanliness and the most fastidious nicety; so that notwithstanding all the artifices and succedaneous contrivances which were so skilfully combined for the purpose of knocking off twenty years in his appearance, there was naught to inspire a feeling of loathing and disgust for the Marquis of Crescentino.

"You have frankly made certain proposals, my lord," said Floribel; "and I will as frankly tell you that I am prepared to take them into consideration. I give you no definite answer now—but to-morrow you shall hear from me."

"I bow to your will and pleasure," responded the courteous nobleman, rising from his seat. "Yes—I yield submissively: but, Oh! it will be with suspense and impatience, so far as I myself am concerned! In the meantime is there anything I can do to serve you or to save you the slightest trouble? You may command me. Make me your banker—your messenger—your escort—or your lacquey—and I shall be happy! And even if your decision should to-morrow prove unfavourable, at least suffer me to continue your friend."

"I am really touched by your kindness," rejoined Floribel; "and I wish that I had some service which your lordship could render me in order to prove that I do not hesitate to appeal to your friendship. But there is none. You shall hear from me to-morrow, my lord."

The well-bred and gallant old nobleman took Floribel's hand—bent down and just touched it with his lips—and then with a low bow quitted the apartment.

Again did Floribel give way to her reflections on the incidents of the morning; and with a smile of triumph upon her lips, she murmured, "I may now take my choice amongst four persons! There is Captain St. Didier, with his handsome face and mediocre means: there is the Baron von Friedburgh, with his odours of tobacco, his self-sufficiency, and his well-filled purse: there is the Marquis with his well-bred air, his riches, and



his old age;—and lastly, there is Hector Hardress with ———”

She stopped short in her musings, looked at her watch, and found that it was time to perform her afternoon toilet. She accordingly proceeded to her chamber, where the pretty and active Antonia was soon engaged in arranging the glossy raven hair of her mistress and in selecting the dress which she was to wear. Floribel took plenty of time at her toilet, for she was always indolent and lounging; and if it were not for the activity of Antonia, the proceedings of the dressing-chamber would always have been considerably prolonged.

When Floribel's toilet was finished, alike to her own and Antonia's satisfaction, she returned into the sitting-apartment to await the arrival of the Hon. Hector Hardress. But before we relate what occurred between them, we must direct the attention of the reader to other circumstances which

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here interweave themselves in the thread of our narrative.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE TWO WARRANTS.

IN the forenoon of this day of which we are writing, Sir Alexander Holcroft and Carlotta paid a visit of about half-an-hour to Floribel's suite of apartments;—and they then returned to their own.

“My dear Alexander,” said the affectionate Italian girl, “will you not now again see about the requisite fulfilment of the formulas for our marriage?”

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As this was the question which Carlotta had regularly put to him every day for a week past, the Baronet was by no means pleased with its reiteration. He was tired of inventing excuses: he knew that an explanation must take place sooner or later; and it now suddenly occurred to him that it might just as well be got over at once. Nevertheless, as he experienced some little degree of affection for Carlotta—indeed, we may even say that he had learnt to love her more than he had ever yet loved any female in his life—he sought to break the truth to her with as much delicacy as possible. Taking her, therefore, upon his knee—placing his arm round her slender waist—and contemplating her with the utmost kindness, he said, “Do you not know that I love you very much, my Carlotta?”

“Oh, yes! I know it!” she exclaimed with enthusiasm. “And do you not know, on the other hand, that I love you very much in return?”

“I am sure of it,” he replied. “Therefore, my pretty Carlotta, is it not sufficient that our two hearts are united by ties of the most delicate and refined character—by the purest and sweetest sentiments—?”

“Sufficient! What do you mean?” asked the young lady innocently. “Of course those ties unite hearts: but it is the priest’s blessing, as well as the signing of the civil contract according to the law, which unites hands.”

“Where the hearts are united, Carlotta,” observed the Baronet, “the hands must of necessity be joined.”

“Oh, not so!” she exclaimed. “For instance, if my father were suddenly to make his appearance, you could not prevent him from taking me away—I am not your wife, you know—you have no legal claim upon me—”

“Oh, you would not be compelled to go with him, Carlotta,” rejoined Sir Alexander; “because this is another country, and Sardinia has nothing to do with Tuscany.”

“I do not know how this may be,” she answered. “But why do you make all these observations? Oh, I am almost frightened at the thoughts which are rising up in my mind! Tell me—Oh! tell me frankly at once, Alexander! You mean to marry me—do you not?”

“Should we love each other one shade the more sincerely—one jot the more fervently,” asked Holcroft, “simply because certain formulas and ceremonies were passed through?”

“Oh! you are only putting these questions to try me?” exclaimed the ingenuous Carlotta. “I am sure that such is your motive! No, Alexander—we should not love each other better if those ceremonies took place: but perhaps you would respect me more.”

“Ridiculous, my dear girl! I already respect as much as I love you!”

“Ah! I should respect myself,” pursued Carlotta, in whose mind the light of intelligence grew stronger and stronger on the point, the more it was discussed. “Besides, Alexander, I never could look my father or mother in the face—”

“They were not so very kind to you!” interjected the Baronet somewhat impatiently.

“Nevertheless, they are my parents. If I quitted them, it was for your sake, Alexander; and as I loved them dearly and fondly, you may under-

stand how much I love you that I should have abandoned them on your account. Oh! do not talk to me any more in the strain which has really afflicted and frightened me: but do hasten—Oh! hasten, I implore you—and fulfil the formulas which are necessary for the solemnisation of our marriage.”

“It is impossible at present, Carlotta,” replied Holcroft. “Do not be frightened, dearest! do not be angry! do not be afflicted!—but there are certain family reasons—I cannot exactly explain them at this present moment—”

Something told Carlotta that he whom she loved was deceiving her; and suddenly disengaging herself from the half-embrace in which he held her, she fixed her eyes earnestly upon him, saying in a voice that was full of emotion, “Do you mean me to understand that you are not prepared to make me your wife?”

“You must not take the thing in this way, Carlotta!” exclaimed the Baronet. “If you do, I shall fancy that your love was a pretence, and that you merely entertained the selfish design to become the sharer of my rank and fortune.”

Carlotta burst into tears, but the next moment she wiped them away—and she responded in a voice full of tenderness and of reproach, “You know that it is not so, Alexander! I loved you before I comprehended what the title of an English Baronet was; and not even at this moment do I know, or care to know, the amount of your riches. I loved you for yourself! but I love my parents also—and I will not live to distress and afflict them! I respect myself—I value a good name and an honourable reputation; and I will not live in dishonour! I have committed a fault: but it was through the blind confidence that I reposed in your sincerity. Oh, let me not be deceived! make me your wife: or else—”

“Or else what, Carlotta?” asked Sir Alexander quickly.

“Or else I will leave you this moment—at once—and for ever.”

The Baronet was astonished at this display of mingled firmness of character and rectitude of principle on the part of the Italian young lady. He thought—as most libertines would have done in such a case—that inasmuch as she had consented to flee with him, and had received him to her arms as if he was a lawful husband, she would not be over nice or scrupulous. Her seduction had proved comparatively easy; and he had measured her virtue in proportion. He now perceived that he was wrong: he saw that she was a thoroughly ingenuous, artless, and well-meaning young creature—trusting and full of confidence—and hitherto not dreaming of the intense wickedness to which man’s deception might reach, because she herself was full of sincerity and truth, and devoid of guile. Libertine though he was, and thoroughly hardened as a man of the world, Sir Alexander could not help admiring her: he even experienced a remorse that he should have led her astray—and he somewhat trembled for the consequences.

“My dear Carlotta,” he said, “I implore you to listen to me patiently for a little while. It frequently happens that a gentleman and a lady live together without having passed through those ceremonies which—”

"Enough!" ejaculated Carlotta. "If you do not marry me, it must be because you intend some day or another to separate from me. I will not wait for that misery!—I shall be constantly living in suspense with the knowledge that the fatal day must sooner or later come! Answer me therefore, Alexander;—for though it will be death for me to tear myself away——"

"Then do not, do not think of such a thing!" ejaculated the Baronet,—"much less talk of it! Come, Carlotta—resolve to make yourself happy—to make me happy likewise!"

She seemed to hesitate: her bosom heaved and sank convulsively—the colour went and came in rapid transitions on her countenance—and her eyelids quivered as if tears were about to gush forth. But suddenly her strength of mind became uppermost; and that young lady so ingenuous and so inexperienced—so artless that her conduct had often seemed to be characterized by a girlish silliness—developed a powerfulness of purpose which astonished her libertine seducer.

"It is death, I repeat, to part!" she cried: "but it shall be death rather than a prolonged dishonour! Farewell, Alexander!"

She was hastening to the door, when it opened with violence; and her father, followed by the young privat Falconara and a middle-aged gentleman dressed in black, entered the room! Carlotta shrieked: her first impulse was to fly into her father's arms—but recollecting her degraded position, she sank down at his feet, exclaiming, "Pardon! pardon!"

"Daughter," said Captain Belluno, "am I to welcome you as an honourably wedded wife? or am I to look upon you as a dishonoured creature?" He paused for a few moments: Carlotta only answered by sobs as she clung to her father's knees; and then he said, "Ah! all this is eloquent enough! It only speaks too strongly of your degradation! Rise, girl—rise! You have yet a chance of being enabled to look the world in the face, without a blush upon your cheeks!"

Sir Alexander Holcroft was startled and even affrighted by the sudden appearance of Carlotta's father, accompanied by the young priest and the middle-aged stranger, whoever he might be: but quickly flinging a mental glance over the whole proceeding in respect to the young lady, he felt that he was safe from any other species of mischief beyond that of a mere provocation to a duel. He therefore saw the necessity of assuming a demeanour of haughty self-possession: but he spoke not a word. He waited until the visitors should explain their purpose.

Carlotta rose from her suppliant posture before her father; and covering her blushing cheeks with her hands, she sank upon a sofa.

"Sir Alexander Holcroft," said Captain Belluno, walking straight up to the Baronet, "is it your intention to espouse my daughter?"

"That is a question, signor," responded the Baronet, "which had perhaps better be discussed between you and me alone."

The idea of a duel flashed to the brain of the unhappy Carlotta; and starting up from her seat, she threw herself betwixt her sire and her seducer, exclaiming with passionate vehemence, "Oh! peril not your lives on my account!"

"Rest assured," said her father coldly, "that I

mean to do nothing of the sort in respect to my own life."

Carlotta's mind was relieved; and she retreated to the sofa, on which she sat down again; and now it was with a less horrified feeling of suspense that she awaited the issue of the present scene.

"No," continued her father, "I do not intend to risk my life on behalf of a worthless daughter—or on that of a man whom I can only regard as a felon unless he consent to make honourable reparation and atonement for the injury he has inflicted."

"A felon?" exclaimed Holcroft, starting abruptly, while an angry flush came upon his countenance.

"Yes—I repeat the word," said Captain Belluno, whose demeanour was stern, self-possessed, and full of confidence.

"This language, signor, cannot be permitted," said the Baronet, "no matter how great the injury I may have done you. Ask your daughter whether I have not treated her with love and tenderness——"

"Have you promised to marry her?" demanded Belluno.

"It were useless to condescend to a falsehood. You have already more than conjectured that your daughter is not my wife—but I will not do her the injustice to deny that it was under a promise of espousal she consented to flee with me."

"Then that promise must be kept," rejoined Belluno; "or you will submit to the alternative. But again I give you to understand that it is not a duel to which I purpose to provoke you."

"Explain yourself, Captain Belluno!" said Holcroft. "What is this alternative whereunto you allude?"

"The alternative is imprisonment for seven years in the dungeon of a fortress:—and it was with an indescribable sternness that Belluno pronounced these words.

"No, no, father!" cried Carlotta, again springing forward. "I do not wish him to be punished. For all the wrong he has inflicted upon me, I would not have a single hair of his head injured!"

"Be quiet, girl!" interjected Belluno sternly.

"You need not grieve on my account, dear Carlotta," said Holcroft, with a light laugh. "It is a mere threat——"

"Make not too sure," interrupted Belluno.

"Vain and self-sufficient man!" said Father Falconara, now for the first time, taking a part in the present scene: "you are like the generality of mortals!—you fancy that your habitation is built upon a solid rock, when it veritably rests upon a shifting sand!"

Holcroft considered the priest's words were ominous: but still he was utterly at a loss to comprehend by what means the menace of seven years' imprisonment could be carried out; and banishing the sense of alarm, he said, "I am well enough acquainted with the Tuscan law to be aware that it is no crime to run away with a young lady, provided she of her own accord consents to be run away with."

"A truce to this flippancy!" interposed Father Falconara. "It ill becomes you, Sir Alexander Holcroft, to display such want of feeling in the presence of your victim and of her injured parent. But let this scene be brought to an end!"

"Aye—the sooner the better!" ejaculated Holcroft.

"It is assuredly no criminal offence against the Tuscan law," resumed Captain Belluno, "to elope with a dame of a certain age. But it is an offence against the Tuscan law to assume, for any sinister purpose or personal interests, the name, rank, functions, or attributes of an individual in the employment of the Government. It is a crime which is included in the list of felonies! It is branded as infamous! Do you doubt me? You will be convinced when you see the warrant for your apprehension which has been issued by the magistrate at Bagno!"

"Warrant? apprehension?" echoed Carlotta, again bounding forward. "No, no, dear father! I would not for worlds——"

"Silence, daughter, I command you!" interrupted Belluno. "Silence!" and he pushed her aside.

"By heaven!" cried Sir Alexander Holcroft, who though a thorough libertine, had the high spirit of an Englishman. "If you dare treat your daughter brutally in my presence——"

"Oh, do not menace my father!" cried the poor young lady. "It is I who am the cause of all! I have been very guilty—very culpable!—and if my father were to kill me, the chastisement would not be too great!"

"How much longer is this scene to last?" demanded Holcroft. "Granting that the warrant has been issued, I am not to be frightened by the announcement; for Bagno is in Tuscany—and this is Turin in Sardinia!"

"And twenty-one days ago," added the middle-aged gentleman, stepping forward, "a secret treaty was signed between the Sardinian and Tuscan Governments, to the effect that there shall be a reciprocal exercise of the extraditionary principle, and that felons shall be mutually surrendered up between the two States."

"Ah! is this so?" said Sir Alexander, beginning to look slightly anxious.

"Behold!" pursued the middle-aged gentleman, producing two papers from his pocket. "Here is the warrant issued by the Mayor of Bagno, in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, for the arrest and capture of a certain Sir Alexander Holcroft, for a particular felony which is duly set forth, on the joint testimony of his Excellency Captain Belluno and his Reverence Father Falconara——"

"And that other paper," ejaculated the Baronet, impatiently; for the middle-aged gentleman was proceeding to explain the details of the first-mentioned one with the most business-like sententiousness.

"This second paper," said that functionary, "is also a warrant. It is issued by the Sardinian Minister of the Interior, to me, Giovanni Petruccio, Deputy-Inspector of the Central Bureau of Police, commanding me to take you, Sir Alexander Holcroft, into safe custody, and to convey you with the least possible delay to Genoa, to be there placed on board some vessel bound for the port of Leghorn in the State of Tuscany."

While Signor Giovanni Petruccio was proceeding in this strain, Sir Alexander Holcroft had leisure to reflect that despite all his former hardihood, assurance, and confidence, he was in as awkward a

predicament as it was possible to have worked himself into. The warrants were displayed before his eyes; and he knew that they were perfectly genuine. Seven years' incarceration in a Tuscan fortress would be tantamount to taking three times as many years from his life! He glanced at Carlotta, thinking that he should behold her countenance full of hope; but to his surprise, he perceived that its expression was that of the deepest woe, and the tears were raining down her cheeks.

"No, father—no!" she cried, again casting herself at her sire's feet; "you would not do this! What! thrust him into a dungeon? No, no! Oh! do what you will with me—but pardon him! If I have disgraced you, punish me—consign me to a convent—but do not plunge him into a gaol!"

"Peace, daughter—peace!" exclaimed Belluno, with an implacable sternness.

"No—I will not be silenced!" cried Carlotta, with the most impassioned vehemence. "You may kill me—but you shall not injure a hair of his head!"

"He shall espouse you, daughter!" thundered the father; "or he shall be dragged as a felon back to Tuscany, there to be immured in a dungeon! These are the alternatives."

"I ought perhaps here to observe," interrupted Signor Giovanni Petruccio, "that there is no desire on the part of the Sardinian Government to behave with any harshness towards Sir Alexander Holcroft. The sudden cessation of the necessity to execute this warrant of extradition, by the withdrawal or the destruction of the warrant issued by the Mayor of Bagno, would be most satisfactory and pleasing to the Sardinian authorities——"

"Ah! say you so?" ejaculated Carlotta, who had risen from her suppliant posture while Signor Petruccio was speaking; and now she suddenly clutched one of the documents from his grasp and tore it into pieces. "There, Sir Alexander!" she cried; "you are now free! The Tuscan warrant has ceased to exist!"—and she tossed the fragments into the fire.

"By heaven, Carlotta!" exclaimed Holcroft, "this is admirable on your part!"

"Think you," cried the excellent girl, "that I would suffer you to be made miserable by being forced into a marriage with me—or that on the other hand I would for a moment allow the risk of your being imprisoned in one of our horrible Italian fortresses? My God, no! And now fly!—depart! lose not a moment! Away with you to England—and be happy!—Oh, be happy—if you can!"

We should observe that the proceeding on Carlotta's part—we mean the seizure and destruction of the document—was so abrupt—it was indeed effected with such lightning celerity—that there was not a moment to interfere or prevent it on the side of either Petruccio, Belluno, or Falconara. The fragments were burning in the fire before these three persons recovered from the sudden consternation into which the deed threw them.

Sir Alexander Holcroft saw by the manner in which they thus stood aghast, that their power over him was indeed at an end; and for a moment he was tempted to hasten and avail himself of the freedom of action which he had so unexpectedly

obtained. But he looked once more at Carlotta; and then came the one most generous instant which had ever as yet displayed itself in the career of Sir Alexander Holcroft.

"No!" he exclaimed, "I will not flee! I will not depart! I will not prove less generous than you, Carlotta! Besides, I really love you!—and moreover you have this day shown so many admirable qualities—so much virtue and so much self-denial—so much true principle and so much magnanimity—that I feel I should be proud of you as a wife!"

One cry of joy, and the delighted being bounded towards him. Then, as she was strained to his heart, where she sobbed and wept in wild delight, Holcroft went on to say, "Never should I have yielded to threats—no, not even to the dread of a Tuscan fortress. But the goodness of Carlotta has triumphed! Father Falconara, you may now unite our hands according to the ceremony of the Catholic Church, whereof she is a member: and then we will away to the British Embassy, where the chaplain shall rivet the bonds according to the forms of the Protestant faith. Captain Belluno, your hand before you acknowledge me as your son-in-law!"

The hands were clasped accordingly; and the reader may conceive how great was Carlotta's delight when she found that not only was her intended husband established on a complete friendly footing with her sire, but also that Father Falconara was preparing to perform the bridal service. The nuptial blessing was soon pronounced; and the Baronet saluted his young bride as Lady Holcroft.

"And you will never repent," she murmured, as she bid her blushing cheeks in the breast to which he strained her,—“you will never for a moment think that you were by any means coerced into this union?"

"No—never, dearest!" was the response given with enthusiastic fervour. "From this moment forth I feel myself to be an altered man!"

Captain Belluno, Father Falconara, and Signer Petruccio now took their departure—but it was only to proceed to the nearest magistrate's office, where they were in a short time rejoined by Sir Alexander and Lady Holcroft. A notary was sent for; and the "civil contract of marriage," as it is called in the Sardinian States, was duly signed. Some two hours were thus disposed of; and from the magisterial office the party proceeded to the British Embassy, where the services of the chaplain were soon put into requisition;—so that the nuptial ceremony was sanctioned according to the rites of the Protestant Church in order that the union might be perfectly legal and binding in the eye of the British law. The whole proceedings were thus conducted with that degree of secrecy which might raise no suspicion at the hotel that Sir Alexander and Carlotta were only just married; and as they had previously passed there as man and wife, nothing could now transpire to engender the idea in that quarter that the nuptial ceremony had only been solemnized that day.

The Baronet invited Captain Belluno, Father Falconara, and Signor Giovanni Petruccio to dine at that hotel in the evening; and in the meanwhile these three persons took leave of the newly-married couple.

As Sir Alexander was escorting his bride down

the staircase of the mansion of the British Embassy, they met a young gentleman hastily ascending.

"What! De Vere! is it you?" burst from the lips of the Baronet.

"Ah, Holcroft!" cried our hero; "who would have thought of meeting with you at Turin? I fancied that you were buried, for the benefit of your health, amidst the wilds of the Apennines?"

"No, my dear friend," responded the Baronet, smiling at his pretty companion. "I am here to change my condition. In a word, permit me to introduce you to Lady Holcroft."

Charles started for a moment in astonishment—for he never had fancied the Baronet to be a marrying man; but he made a most courteous salutation to the bride.

"Lady Holcroft knows you by name," continued Sir Alexander; "and you may perhaps have heard of her as the Signoretta Belluno—though I believe you did not meet when you were at the Castle of Bagao."

Again was our hero seized with surprise; but being too well bred to betray it for more than an instant, he proffered his congratulations, which were acknowledged with a friendly cordiality on the part of Holcroft and with modest blushes on that of Carlotta.

"And now, my dear fellow," continued Holcroft, "what are you doing at Turin? and why are you rushing up these stairs in so desperate a hurry? Besides, you look jaded and careworn—"

"I have travelled fast," replied our hero. "I come from Florence—I am on my way to England—I am going to get my passport countersigned here, at the Embassy—"

"I hope nothing unpleasant has occurred?" interjected the Baronet.

"Nothing—nothing particular," rejoined our hero quickly. "But I am in haste—"

"I will not detain you. But, Ah!" ejaculated Sir Alexander, "I have something to tell you—though I do not exactly know whether I ought to mention it or not—"

"What do you mean?" cried Charles De Vere.

"Floribel Lister—"

"Floribel?" exclaimed our hero.

"Yes—Floribel Lister is here, in Turin. She is at the Hotel de France. Yet, for heaven's sake, if I am committing any indiscretion in making this announcement—"

"I must see her!" interjected Charles: "but I will not tell her that it is from you I learnt of her being at Turin."

"We also are staying at the Hotel de France," remarked Holcroft.

"I will come thither presently," said our hero; "and if I meet you there, my conduct shall seem as if we had not previously encountered each other in this capital."

He bowed and hurried up the staircase—while Sir Alexander and Lady Holcroft descended to the vehicle which had brought them thither.

CHAPTER XLV.

SCENES AT THE HOTEL.

WE must now return to Floribel—*alias*, Flora Lovel—whom we left at the moment when she had finished her afternoon toilet and had returned to her sitting-room to await the presence of Hector Hardress. The appointment she had given him was for three o'clock; and punctually at that hour he was announced. Floribel was seated on the sofa, from which she rose with a serious expression of countenance to receive him: she did not proffer her hand—she merely inclined her head distantly—and she spoke not a word. The young patrician was evidently not altogether prepared for such a reception as this; and he exclaimed, "Why such coolness, *beauteous* Floribel?"

"Permit me to reply by a question," she said; "and it shall be to ask you why you address me in these terms of intimacy?"

"In one word," rejoined Hector, "have you not comprehended that I love you, and that I have traced you all the way from Florence to Turin, to throw myself at your feet and declare my passion?"

"When I left Florence, upwards of three weeks back," replied Floribel, "Mrs. Hardress was in perfect good health; and I should think that if she had died in the interval you would at least be in mourning."

"It is my misfortune to be married," responded Hector; "and it has been your misfortune to be deluded by a false marriage. Besides, after all, according to the report which generally prevails in Florence, the lovely Floribel when passing under the name of Ciprino, was not very cruel;—and pardon me for adding that this same report avers that more than one was blessed with her favours."

"Not for a moment do I attempt to deny it," rejoined that voluptuous personification of pleasure, who maintained the most perfect self-possession: "but this is no reason wherefore I should receive the visits of Mr. Hardress!"

"Neither would I so far insult you, Floribel, by advancing it as a reason. I love you—and that is sufficient! Twelve days ago I left Florence in search of you: by some means—which I need not now pause to relate—I obtained a clue which made me hope that I had got upon your track: I followed it up—I was successful—and I am now here."

"And immediately upon your arrival," said Floribel, "you intrude upon the privacy of my chamber in a manner, which—no matter what I may be—was, to say the least of it, most ungentlemanly—most unhandsome!"

"You speak harshly and severely, Floribel!" said Hector. "Have I been wrong to entertain the hope that if we met I might possibly be enabled to render myself agreeable to you?"

"Perhaps you presume, Mr. Hardress," interjected Floribel, "on the fact of having given me a ride in your travelling-carriage from the Apennines to Florence? But surely such a poor miserable favour as that which you thus bestowed upon me, could scarcely justify you in your own eyes—"

"No! no!" said Hector, with a deep sense of humiliation: "I am not presuming on that ground. But I really did flatter myself that you would accept the homage of my love! Ah, start not, Floribel!—you are adorable! you are eminently beautiful!"

"You are not the first who has told me this," said Floribel, with a peculiar smile. "You speak to me of love? In plain terms, Mr. Hardress—do you seek me as a mistress?"

"You knew that I am married, Floribel," said Hector; "and enough has been already said between us to show that while on the one hand you are fully aware that I cannot woo you as a wife, I on the other hand have an equal consciousness that it is not the first time you have been sought on terms which are not altogether consistent with the most prudish notions of morality. But pray be merciful towards me! Do you wish to see me at your feet?"

"Let us come to the point, Mr. Hardress," interrupted Floribel. "You seek me as a mistress. What terms have you to propose to me? Do you mean to abandon your wife on my account?"

"If it will smooth away any difficulties, Floribel, and ease your mind at all," said Hector,—"for when I bethink me, it is quite possible you may have some compunctions considering that you were acquainted with Cicely before I married her and that she was a friend of yours—"

"Well, sir, proceed. How do you mean to ease my conscience?"

"Of course what I am going to tell you is sacred between us," observed Hector: "but my wife and I have come to a thorough understanding—"

"Ah, indeed!" ejaculated Floribel. "And what a pleasant understanding this must be!"—then being emitted with a feeling of curiosity, she encouraged her visitor to proceed by means of a sweet smile, at the same time saying, "Do tell me all this, Mr. Hardress; because unless you admit me fully into your confidence, I shall not possibly know how to decide upon the point. Cicely, you tell me, has come to an understanding with you?"

"Yes—a most amicable understanding; and henceforth we are both to do exactly as we like,—I to follow my course—she to pursue her's."

"Ah! this is indeed interesting!" said Floribel; and still more encouraging became her smile. "Do you mean me to understand, Hector—I beg your pardon, Mr. Hardress—"

"For heaven's sake recall not the word!" ejaculated the young patrician, drawing his chair closer to the lady: for he felt as if she had thrown out his Christian name at him as an avowal that she was yielding after a due period of prudish hesitation.

"Well then, I will call you Hector," she said, enveloping him for a moment as it were in the luminousness of her bewitching regards. "But this arrangement which you have effected with your wife,—do you mean me to understand that you have positively agreed between you that while you may take a mistress, she is at liberty to take a lover?"

"Strange as it may appear, this is precisely what I do mean," answered Hector, devouring her with his looks.

"Oh, then, you are almost as good as free to court me in this sense?" exclaimed Floribel.

"Ah! you begin to be melted!" ejaculated Hector, in accents thrilling with delight.

"You are setting my mind at ease," she rejoined. "I naturally looked upon Cicely as a friend—I had known her as Miss Neale—I am also aware that my cousin Agnes entertained an affection for her, and doubtless still entertains it—"

"And now all those compunctions on your part are set at rest! But I will even tell you more," continued Hardress, growing sentimentally maudlin and confidential in proportion as he flattered himself that the beautiful Floribel was yielding to his views. "I have not only agreed that Cicely shall take a lover, if she choose—but she has already found one—or at least her fancy was settled in a particular quarter when I left Florence; and I have no doubt that by this time she is as completely happy in her affair of gallantry as I fondly hope to become in mine."

"The whole adventure is charming," ejaculated Floribel; "and it interests me immensely! Who can be the favoured one?"

"Ah! *that*, perhaps, is the most extraordinary part of it all!" interjected Hardress. "You would scarcely believe it—and I am at a loss whether I ought to go to such an extreme—"

"Oh!" ejaculated Floribel, suddenly pouting her lips, "where there is no confidence there is no love. Give me all your confidence—show that you are sincere in making these advances towards me—"

"A single word from your tongue becomes tantamount to a command!" cried Hector, growing more and more infatuated with the beautiful creature before him; for never once from his memory was absent the ravishing spectacle he had beheld when in the morning he had intruded upon the privacy of her chamber. "You shall have all my confidence!—there is no secret upon earth which I possess that I will not communicate to you! You will be astonished when I tell you that the object of Cicely's fantasy is none other than—Guess! But no! you will never do it! I mean Charles De Vere."

Floribel started with the utmost amazement: then she bent her large dark eyes with a look of incredulity upon Hector Hardress: but suddenly recollecting that he had merely said his wife had taken a fancy in that quarter, without averring that the passion was reciprocated, she said, "Ah! is it indeed so?"

"It is as I tell you, Floribel: but of course I cannot do more than surmise concerning the success that Cicely may have experienced—for I left Florence on the very day when we came to our arrangement. And now, adorable creature! what hope dare I entertain? Ah! I might urge as a passport to your favour that I punished the man who played so villanous a part towards you—I killed Theodora Clifford—"

"Yea!" interjected Floribel, with a look of aversion and disgust; "but you were not purposely avenging me at the time—you were vindicating some private quarrel of your own—and therefore you must not make a merit of that deed!"

"Let us put it out of the question," said Hardress. "But for my own sake—for the love that I bear you—"

"I cannot become the mistress of a married

man," answered Floribel. "You have now my decision."

"Your decision?" echoed the young patrician, with a look of mingled astonishment and vexation. "What! after all I have told you in reference to my wife and myself?"

"I have thought better of it," said Floribel. "My decision is given: it is positive and it is final."

"Do you mean me to understand that I have no hope?" asked Hector, his cheeks and his lips white with the rage that was gathering within him.

"Do not let there be any folly between us!" rejoined Floribel: "do not speak of hope and love in the same sentimental style as if you were wooing me for a wife! Be sensible and be reasonable! You ask me to become your mistress—and I decline the honour. You will now have the goodness to leave me."

"No—by heavens, no! not on these terms!" exclaimed Hector. "Why did you ere now smile encouragingly upon me? why did you call me by my Christian name?"

"I was reflecting—I was meditating at the time. I had not made up my mind. Surely you would not have had me give you an abrupt answer in the negative without the slightest reflection? If I had done so, then indeed you might have said that I was treating you with insult!"

"All this is evasion, Floribel!" ejaculated Hector. "For some reason you have made me your dupe: but I am not a man to suffer myself to be trifled with! I give you one more chance—and if you still scorn my overtures, beware!—for by heaven! I will be avenged!"

"Oh, if ever there were a moment when I thought well of your overtures," exclaimed Floribel, disdainfully, "the conduct which you are now displaying—so infamous and so cowardly—"

"You do not know my character!" cried Hector. "I will either love or hate you: I will do all I can to serve you—or I will become your bitterest persecutor! Ah! you smile? you defy me? Beware! Think you that I am ignorant of the weak point through the medium of which the sharpest poniard may be plunged into your heart, or the barbed arrow be made to rankle there! Yea!—I know it!—you would sooner die than let your cousin Agnes know that Floribel Lister was identical with that Ciprina whose name has become notorious in Florence!"

Floribel's cheeks became pale; but quickly regaining her self-possession, she rose from her seat, and said with a calm air of defiance, "You will not dare make those revelations to my cousin Agnes."

"Reckon not upon my forbearance!" exclaimed Hardress menacingly.

"No," said Floribel. "I do not reckon upon your forbearance: but I reckon upon your fears."

"My fears?" ejaculated Hardress: and he laughed scornfully. "My fears! Of what?"

"That I should retaliate most bitterly," rejoined Floribel. "Oh! it was not without a motive that I ere now smiled encouragingly and called you by your Christian name! It was to lead you on in your confidential mood. Curiosity at first inspired me; and then it suddenly struck me that it were as well to provide myself with

certain weapons of defence against you. This I did; and I rejoice at my prudence and forethought. Now tell me whether I may not defy your threats! For if it should ever come to the knowledge of my cousin Agnes that Floribel Lister and the Signora Ciprina were one and the same person, I shall at once take it for granted that you, Hector Hardress—either directly or indirectly, either anonymously or in an open and avowed manner—communicated the fact. And then, by way of reprisal, I shall proclaim to the world how the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Hardress made together an infamous compact, by virtue of which the husband was suffered to woo me as his mistress, while the wife obtained leave and license to bestow her favours upon Charles De Vere!"

While Floribel was thus speaking, the very individual whom she last mentioned—namely, Charles De Vere himself—opened the door of the apartment. He stopped short on the threshold, transfixed with an amazement amounting almost to stupefaction at the words which came from Floribel's lips;—and we should add that his presence remained unnoticed, as the opening of the door had been previously unheard, by Hector Hardress and the young lady.

"These threats shall not serve you!" exclaimed Hector, furious with rage and maddened with the passion which the spectacle of Floribel's charms had inspired him with in the morning. "You shall be mine! you shall be mine!"

He sprang forward—he seized her in his arms: but the next instant Charles De Vere rushed in to afford his succour. He tore Floribel from Hector's grasp; and upon the young patrician himself did our spirited hero bestow a buffet which sent him reeling to the opposite side of the apartment. Floribel sank down fainting upon the floor; for the sudden excitement of the scene had overpowered her. Fortunately at that moment Lady Holcroft made her appearance. She had just returned to the hotel after her marriage with the Baronet: she was coming to announce the joyous intelligence to Floribel; and she therefore just arrived at the very nick of time to render those succours which women can best afford under such circumstances.

"Mr. De Vere," said Hector Hardress, walking straight up to our hero and speaking in a low hoarse voice, "you have insulted me, sir!"

"Destard that you are!" responded Charles; "it was you who first insulted her who now lies inanimate there! But this is not the place for disputing. You may hear of me at the Hotel de l'Europe. My time is valuable—heaven knows how valuable!—but I will remain in Turin for a little time longer than I originally intended, that I may again have an opportunity of chastising you."

"And *this* time," rejoined Hector, with deep bitterness in his accents, and with a look full of concentrated rage, "the ground shall not be left until one shall have succumbed! It shall be a duel unto the very death!"

With these words Hector Hardress hastened from the room. Floribel was already returning to consciousness: she caught those words that were thus uttered: they emote her comprehension in a moment.

"A thousand, thousand thanks, dear Carlotta!"

she said, speaking in Italian: then springing up to her feet, she turned towards De Vere, saying in the English tongue, "Charles, is it possible that you intend to fight a duel on my account?"

"I wish to speak to you on most important subjects, Floribel," said our young hero, evasively. "Pray get rid of Lady Holcroft for a few minutes."

"Carlotta, my dear friend," said Floribel, now quickly turning again towards the bride, "leave me with Signor De Vere——"

"One word!—only one word," whispered Carlotta; "and I leave you! Oh, I am supremely happy! I can now look the world in the face! I am married!"

"Married?" echoed Floribel, half in amazement and half in credulity.

"Yes—it is so, I can assure you!" ejaculated Carlotta, though in a whispering voice. "Married by the priest, and married by the chaplain! But I will tell you all about it presently, my dear friend. Ah! what was that rude person who has just left, doing that you fainted?"

"I in my turn," rejoined Floribel, "will tell you everything presently. Meanwhile accept my sincerest congratulations, Lady Holcroft—for it delights me thus to call you!"

The warm-hearted Carlotta kissed Floribel on the cheek, and then hastened from the room. The moment the door closed behind her, Floribel said to De Vere, "Excuse me for a few minutes, Charles. I am overpowered by my feelings—I must retire for a brief space to my chamber! I will rejoin you again."

"I will await your return, Floribel," said our hero, taking a seat.

The young lady proceeded to her own chamber; and there flinging herself upon a sofa, she pressed her hands in anguish to her brow, exclaiming, "A duel on my account! No, no! heaven forbid! But how to prevent it? Ah! a thought strikes me!"

She opened her writing-desk, and hastily penned the following lines:—

"I promised that you should hear from me: I have thought well of all you said, and I feel that I can love you. But you must give me a prompt and immediate proof of the love which you have avowed. A duel is meditated between two young Englishmen; and the quarrel has arisen on my account. I will explain everything when we meet. Meanwhile, believe me when I assure you that it was through no imprudence, nor coquetry, nor folly on my part that this serious complication has arisen. You must likewise understand that I have the most urgent reasons for desiring that this duel shall not take place. You must prevent it—and I will tell you how. Use your influence to procure the immediate arrest of the Hon. Hector Hardress, on the ground that he meditates a hostile encounter with another Englishman named Charles De Vere. I believe that Hardress is staying at this hotel: De Vere is at the Hotel de l'Europe. At the same time that Hector Hardress is arrested, let an intimation be sent to De Vere commanding him to quit the Sardinian territory forthwith. Fulfil my demand—and I am yours!"

Floribel sealed the letter and addressed it to



Captain St. Didior. She then rang the bell; and when Antonia answered the summons, she bade her take immediate measures to have the *billet* conveyed to its destination. This matter being adjusted, she felt comparatively easy in her mind; and she returned to the apartment where she had just left Charles De Vere.

"Is it possible, Floribel," our young hero at once said, as she made her appearance, "that my ears did not deceive me when methought you proclaimed that an infamous compact had been made between Hardress and his wife?"

"Yes, Charles—it was so," replied Floribel. "Hector Hardress is a villain! He persecuted me with his detestable overtures—he menaced me—but, Ah! me thinks that I out-manceuvred him—and I gathered from his lips that secret which it seems met your ears!"

"And now, Floribel," said Charles, "let us speak
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of yourself. You fled away so hastily from Florence——"

"Because I did not wish to see you again, Charles," she at once replied: "for we are pursuing different pathways in the world. The same reasons which prevented me from wishing to meet you in Florence, also make me regret that we should be now meeting in Turin. I know all that you would say to me—and I fully appreciate the excellence of your motives. But you must leave me to my own course!"

"No, Floribel!" interjected Charles; "not if that course be a sinful one! Besides, I cannot leave you yet—I have a revelation of the utmost importance to make——"

"A revelation?" echoed Floribel. "What can you mean? Is it good? or is it evil?"

"Oh! let me hope that it will tend to your good," cried De Vere fervently; "for however

much my prayers, representations, and remonstrances may fail to divert your footsteps from the path of error, yet surely you will not prove equally indifferent to the entreaties and the counsels which will no doubt be addressed to you by him who is perhaps seeking you in Italy——"

"What on earth do you mean, Charles?" ejaculated Floribel: "to whom can you possibly allude?"

"The long lost is found—the dead has come to life! Your uncle—the father of Agnes——"

"Oh! is this possible?" murmured Floribel, as a faintness came over her. "Good heavens! are you telling me the truth? or is it merely a stratagem on your part—well meant, yet based on misrepresentation, for the purpose of wielding an influence over my mind—inducing me perhaps to return to England——"

"Floribel, I am incapable of deceiving you on so serious a subject! I take heaven to witness that I am telling you the truth. Morton Evelyn is alive!—he has proclaimed himself to me——it matters not how nor why——he is rich and he is noble—he is the veritable heir of the Ormsby race after all!"

"Good heavens! is this true? or is it a dream?" murmured Floribel. "The dead alive! the lost found! Oh, what marvels! what wonders! Leave me now, Charles—I beseech you, leave me to reflect on all that you have been saying!"

"Yes—I will leave you, Floribel," responded our hero,—"on condition that you faithfully and sacredly promise me that you will not flee from Turin as suddenly as you fled from Florence—but that you will see me again."

"I promise you faithfully, Charles, I will not depart from Turin as abruptly as I departed from Florence."

"I will return in the evening," said our hero; "and then, Floribel—*then*, you will suffer me to have the most serious conversation with you?"

With these words Charles De Vere took his leave of Floribel, and retraced his steps towards the Hotel de l'Europe,—there to await any message which Hector Hardress might think fit to send him.

The *billet* which Floribel had entrusted to Antonia, was quickly consigned to the hands of a porter, and by this functionary conveyed to the apartments of Captain St. Didier in the royal palace. The handsome young aide-de-camp was at home at the moment: he perused the letter with a feeling of delight, and immediately set off to pay a visit to Signor Giovanni Petruccio, Deputy-Inspector of the Central Bureau of Police. With this gentlemen the business was quickly arranged; and three police-agents in plain clothes, were at once despatched to the Hotel de France. On arriving there, two of the agents remained in the street, while the third entered the establishment and inquired for the Hon. Hector Hardress. The waiter at once conducted the official to Hector's apartment.

Barely an hour had elapsed since the occurrence in Floribel's room; but Hector was still pacing to and fro in the vain endeavour to compose his feelings somewhat, that he might deliberate how he was to proceed in order to make the requisite arrangements for a duel with De Vere. The waiter entered, saying, "If you please, signor, a gentleman wishes to speak to you."

"Ah!" ejaculated Hardress—for it immediately struck him that Charles himself must have taken the initiative in the conduct of the proceedings. "Admit the gentleman, by all means!"

The police-agent in plain clothes was ushered into the apartment; and he at once announced himself as an officer of the law,—adding, "It is exceedingly disagreeable, signor—but I must request you to follow me."

"Follow you?" ejaculated Hector. "And where the devil am I to follow you to?"

"Why, signor, if the truth must be told, I am charged to conduct you to prison."

"Prison?" echoed the young Englishman: and he laughed scornfully. "Do you know who I am? I am the son of an English nobleman! Besides, there must be some mistake!—for I have done nothing that could warrant you in arresting me."

"I beg your Excellency's pardon," rejoined the police agent; "you are charged with meditating a duel——"

"Is it possible," ejaculated Hardress, "that De Vere could have turned coward and poltroon—traitor and sneak—and that he has given information——"

"So far from this being the case, signor," interrupted the official, "I have received orders to adopt particular measures against him also. These I shall execute as soon as I have conveyed you to a place of security."

"But what are those measures?" demanded Hector.

"To see that Signor De Vere quits Turin within six hours," was the response.

"And if he do," ejaculated Hector, "then may I presume that my own term of imprisonment——"

"It will not be necessary to retain you, signor, another hour in custody," was the reply, delivered with an exceeding courtesy.

"Then be it as you say," said Hardress; "for it is but a question of a few hours' delay—and if we are not permitted to fight the duel in Sardinia, I may follow De Vere into France, where they are less particular."

"In that respect, signor, you can do as you think fit," rejoined the officer, with a polite bow. "Ah! I should observe that inasmuch as this arrest of your's has been accomplished so quietly, no one need know anything about it in the hotel. You can put a few little necessaries in your pocket—'tis but the matter of a few hours—and perhaps you will not even be condemned to pass the night in gaol."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Hardress.

His preparations were soon made; and in a few minutes he accompanied the police-officer from the hotel.

About half-an-hour later, as Charles De Vere was seated in his apartment at his own hotel, the waiter entered and announced a gentleman who wished to have some little discourse. Our hero naturally thought that it was a messenger on behalf of Hector Hardress; and he was therefore startled and amazed when the personage, on entering, at once said, "Signor, I am an agent of the police."

Charles, being somewhat more keen-witted than Hector, quickly began to suspect that the object of the official visit was to prevent the duel: but

he remained silent, and simply by a bow conveyed an acknowledgment of the announcement which had just been made him.

"I am sorry, Signor De Vere," continued the agent, "to be compelled to disturb any arrangements which you have made in reference to your sojourn at Turin: but it is absolutely indispensable for the maintenance of peace that you should depart from the city. Therefore, signor, I request that this you will do with the least possible delay. You cannot fail to comprehend that I allude to a meditated duel, whereof intelligence has by certain private means reached the police."

"Ah!" ejaculated our hero: "and I am ordered to quit Turin immediately?"

"Let me tell you, signor, that the Hon. Hector Hardress is already arrested—he is in custody—and his release now depends upon the expedition with which you may quit the Sardinian capital."

"I deny your power thus to expel me from your city," said Charles: "you can only act upon positive information—and this it is impossible you could have had.—Ah! perhaps Floribel herself may have given it!" he mentally ejaculated.

"What is your decision, signor?" demanded the police-agent.

"I will hand to the mandate whereof you are the bearer," responded Charles. "At the expiration of an hour I will leave Turin."

"Enough, signor!" answered the police-agent with a bow: and he then took his departure.

"Now for the promised interview with Floribel ere I leave Turin!" said Charles to himself. "But, Ah! I will leave a letter with Holcroft, to be delivered to Hardress, to bid him follow me into France, if he will—and there will I give him satisfaction. Yes! it is thus that I must arrange my plans!"

Charles wrote the letter accordingly—thrust it into his pocket—and set out for the Hotel de France. It was now six o'clock in the evening: it was quite at the close of November; and obscurity prevailed in the streets of Turin. As Charles issued from the hotel, it struck him that he was followed by two persons who had previously been standing together on the opposite side of the street, and who separated on beholding him come forth, but who nevertheless pursued the same route with a short interval between them. Our hero was too much accustomed to the proceedings of Continental towns not to observe such a circumstance as this which we have just noticed; and he therefore thought to himself, "Despite the promise which I have given to leave the city in an hour, the police-agents are still watching me!"

Indifferent however upon the subject, he was pursuing his way, and had just reached the commencement of the street in which the Hotel de France was situated, when a man, hastily overtaking him, swept past,—at the same time giving utterance to a name in a low yet distinct tone. That name was *Count of Camerino*.

Charles was astounded; and he suddenly stopped short. What could it mean? Was the man one of those whom through the obscurity he had ere now seen separate and follow him?—and if so, were they police-agents after all? Scarcely had he asked himself these questions, when the man who had brushed past him, suddenly turned

and retraced his way—again saying as distinctly as possible, "*Count of Camerino*!"

"Wall, Count of Camerino!" ejaculated our hero, again stopping short. "I know the name! What do you mean?"

"It is all right," responded the man. "The Count of Camerino summons you!"

"In that case lead the way," said Charles. "I follow."

The man turned abruptly into a diverging street:—there he was joined for a moment by another man—they exchanged a few words, and separated,—one retracing his way, the other continuing to act as our hero's guide. Charles was convinced that they were the same whom he had noticed at the front of the hotel; and he was equally certain that his impression was erroneous, and that they were not police-agents after all. On the contrary, the thought struck him that they were much more likely to be persons who were anxious to shield their proceedings from the police. And now, all in a moment, ideas of plots and conspiracies in which the Count of Camerino might possibly be engaged, flashed to the mind of our hero, and made him hesitate whether to follow any farther in the footsteps of his guide. But then he reflected that it was scarcely possible the Count of Camerino could be intriguing in Sardinia; for there was nothing in common betwixt the affairs of that kingdom and of Naples. Besides, Charles also reflected that the Count's past experiences must have been bitter enough to teach him severe lessons, and that it was therefore little probable after all that he was actually engaged in fresh machinations of a political character. Nevertheless, it naturally occurred to him that he might just as well put an inquiry or two to the person whom he was following; and quickening his steps, he soon overtook this individual, whom he now observed to be a respectably-dressed man, of about the middle age, and with a calm but determined expression of countenance—as he was enabled to perceive by the light of a lamp suddenly flashing on the individual's features.

"Permit me to ask a question," said Charles.

"Hush!" said the man: "hush! This is not the place for discourse—nor have I the time! In a few minutes—"

Charles lost the remainder of the sentence, on account of the man's suddenly quickening his pace. Again our hero had his misgivings: but once more did he reassure himself by means of his reflections.

"The Count of Camerino," he thought to himself, "would not lead me into any difficulty! He may happen to know that I am at Turin—and if so, it is natural that he should wish to see me. After all, it would be most unkind and ungenerous on my part not to obey the summons!"

The guide continued to lead the way for the space of about five minutes longer; and then he abruptly stopped short at the entrance to a narrow lane formed by the backs of a row of small houses on the one side and by a high garden-wall on the other.

"Follow me close," said the man; and the injunction was more or less necessary, inasmuch as the lane was involved in an almost complete darkness.

An idea of some treachery for an instant struck

our hero: but the next moment he banished it—and he continued to follow the footsteps of the guide. This individual presently stopped at a low door in the high garden-wall to which we are now alluded; he gave three raps in a peculiar manner—the door opened—and the man, clutching Charles by the wrist, said curtly, “This way!”

Our hero crossed the threshold: he was dragged over it, as it were, by the suddenness of the jerking clutch made at him; and the door instantaneously closed behind him.

He was inside a garden—and another man was at the door: but the one who had guided him thither, at once led the way along an avenue formed by tall trees with over-arching boughs. An almost total obscurity prevailed: but at the extremity of the long vista lights were discerned. These rapidly grew brighter and brighter; and on emerging from the avenue, our hero found that he was in the immediate vicinity of a spacious mansion brilliantly lighted, while the sounds of soft music came floating upon his ear.

“One word!” he said to the man who was acting as his guide: “one word, I insist!”

“Not a syllable, signor!” cried the other. “In another minute you will see her Highness!”

Charles was amazed; and he would have put another question despite the injunction given to the contrary, only that at this moment a side door of the mansion was reached—and the man opened it. A lamp burnt inside a little vestibule with which this door communicated: but the man at once led the way up a staircase. A landing was reached; it was of a size corresponding with the vestibule below: but all that Charles had as yet seen of the place, little though it were, gave him the idea of an elegantly-furnished dwelling. His guide threw open the door of a room lighted by a lamp fed with perfumed oil, and where the appointments were all of the most costly description. Curtly bidding him wait there, the man suddenly disappeared.

Charles was left by himself for about a couple of minutes, to wonder whether he were about to see the Count of Camerino, and why the proceeding had been conducted with so much mystery,—when the door opened, and a lady of grand and striking beauty, and apparelled in an elegant evening toilet, entered the room.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE PRINCESS AND THE COUNTESS.

THE lady who thus entered the apartment, was tall and of commanding presence. She was splendidly formed; and her apparel was characterized by mingled richness and elegance. Her age might be about six-and-twenty. Her hair was dark—her eyes, not large, but very handsome, were brilliantly expressive. They shone with the light of intelligence; and they shed their beams as it were upon a countenance of the noblest beauty. So distinguished was the mien of this lady, and so exquisitely did the feminine graces blend with a certain air of dignity and self-possession, that her very looks would serve as weapons to beat down any libertine regards that might be levelled at her.

Indeed, it was impossible to survey her otherwise than with mingled admiration and respect.

As she made her appearance in the room, Charles De Vere saluted her with the profoundest respect; and she, at once proffering him her hand, said with a significant look, and with all the emphasis of which the golden accents of an Italian tongue are capable, “Welcome thou as one of us!”

These words, striking ominously upon the ears of Charles, tended to confirm the suspicion which had previously floated in his mind to the effect that some fresh political conspiracy was on the tapis; and he hastened to say, “I hope there is no mistake, signora, in the causes that have led me to be conducted hither? But I came only in the expectation of meeting—”

“The Princess of Spartivento?” added the lady, “Well, she is before you.”

“I am proud and flattered to be permitted to form the acquaintance of your Highness,” responded Charles with another profound bow, “but I must candidly confess that I had no conception this honour was in store for me. I knew not to whose mansion I was being brought—I fancied only that I was to see my friend the Count of Camerino.”

The Princess looked astonished: then an expression of incredulity passed over her countenance; and this was almost instantaneously succeeded by a smile, as she said, “I understand, Signor De Vere! Circumstances have rendered you cautious. I cannot do otherwise than approve of your conduct. Have the goodness to remain here for a few minutes.”

“But may I entreat your Highness—”

“Enough, signor!” interrupted the Princess of Spartivento, with an air alike commanding and gracious: and she immediately quitted the apartment.

“Surely there must be a misapprehension somewhere!” thought Charles to himself, the instant he was again alone. “Is it possible that to add to all my other difficulties and causes of vexation, I am now to be plunged into some political intrigue or conspiracy, just because I happened once to possess the acquaintance of the Count of Camerino? Ah! there would indeed be but little real friendship on his part if he were thoughtlessly and rashly to involve me in such a dilemma! Besides, many long months have now elapsed since he and I parted in Naples—Yes, nearly a year—and during that interval I have had no communication with him.”

Charles knew how terribly dangerous a thing it was to become involved in an Italian conspiracy; and brave though he naturally were, he trembled at the idea. Besides, he had his own pressing affairs to attend to: he was anxious to reach England with the least possible delay and have an interview with Agnes. But even if he were completely free and unoccupied in all other respects, he was not prepared to mix himself up with the politics of a foreign country—and all the less so, inasmuch as these politics were of a class calculated to plunge their disciples into a vortex of dangers. It is not therefore surprising if Charles suddenly thought of beating an immediate retreat from the Spartivento palace; he was even advancing towards the door with the intention of carrying this purpose into effect, when it suddenly

occurred to him that such a proceeding would be characterized alike by a discourtesy and a cowardice the bare idea of which now all in a moment brought a burning blush to his cheeks.

"At all events," he said, "I will wait and have a full explanation with her Highness, so that I may retreat with honour and propriety from these complications, whatever they be, wherein I find myself involved."

The sounds of joyous music now again rang through the spacious mansion, and came floating upon the ears of our hero in that retired apartment where he was now waiting. He listened; and he could then distinctly catch the blending of many voices, male and female, in a chorus which was accompanied by that grand music. He was standing near the casement, which was partly open, listening to the concert, when a curious spectacle developed itself to his view.

We should further observe that he was leaning against that casement, his countenance so turned that his looks commanded a view of the room, for he was waiting for the door to open for the expected reappearance of the Princess. In the centre of the apartment there was a round table, covered with a superb scarlet cloth with a gold fringe that swept the floor. This table began to revolve slowly; and Charles was smitten with amazement. He passed his hand across his eyes, and looked again. It was no illusion: the table was still moving by some unseen agency. Our hero sprang forward; but he abruptly stopped short—for the table, in passing gradually away from the centre of the room, was revealing a dark hole or black chasm. Then from the depths thereof a light flashed upward, blending with the rays of the perfumed lamp; and a female form gradually ascended to the view of our hero.

Charles was lost in a bewildering wonderment—and all the more so when he perceived that the lady who thus revealed herself, was of a ravishing beauty. It instantaneously struck him that there was a certain degree of resemblance between her and the Princess di Spartivento, so that they might possibly be sisters: but this lady who now emerged from the abyss, was three or four years younger than her Highness. Her hair was not quite so dark—but it was more redundant in its masses, which flowed over her shoulders. Her eyes were large and bright; an expression of sweetness and true feminine modesty was singularly blended with an air of settled firmness and decision. Her apparel was not an evening toilet: she wore one of those vests or waistcoats which were just then coming into fashion on the Continent: it was open at the bosom, which was however modestly covered with under-garments. Her head-dress consisted only of the folds of a thick veil, which she had thrown back while emerging from the chasm—so that her charming face, enframed in the masses of her luxuriant hair, was at once revealed to our hero. In stature she was below the height of the Princess; and her figure was modelled to more slender proportions. She carried a lamp in one hand—while with the other she held back the veil, the ample folds of which would have otherwise floated around her person. The appearance of such a being from such a place seemed to have something preterhuman in it; and the whole proceeding looked as if magic were at its source.

"Be kind enough to follow me," said the lady; and she spoke with a modest affability.

Charles hesitated. Not that he mistrusted this fair creature or fancied that she was about to beguile him into any danger—but because he dreaded lest the farther he plunged into all the mysteries that were developing themselves, the less easy would become his ultimate retreat.

"Will you not follow me?" asked the lady, with an air of mingled surprise and remonstrance. "But, Ah! my sister perhaps may not have told you whom you might expect to become your guide. I am the Countess di Milazzo. And now, signor, without another syllable be pleased to follow me."

Still Charles hesitated; and he said, "Would your ladyship favour me with your patient attention for a few moments—and I will soon explain—"

"Not here! not here!" interrupted the Countess di Milazzo. "Everything you may have to say must be told elsewhere. Come!"

Confused and bewildered by all that was passing, and deeply anxious to bring matters to a crisis without any further delay, our hero began to follow the lady down a descent of stone steps which the opening in the floor disclosed, and up which she had in the first instance emerged to his view. When they had descended about twenty of these steps, the Countess grasped a handle attached to a small wheel fixed against the wall of solid masonry; and as she turned the wheel, Charles became aware that the moveable part of the floor on which the centre table stood in the room above, was now closing overhead. When the process was finished, the Countess continued her descent of the stone steps,—our hero following. To a considerable distance was this descent continued, until a vaulted passage was reached, evidently in the very foundations of the mansion. Whither could the Countess be conducting him? what did all this mean? and what would be the issue of the adventure? Such were the questions that Charles asked himself, but for the solution of which no surmise afforded any clue.

At length the Countess di Milazzo stopped at a door at the end of the stone passage; and at this she knocked in a peculiar manner which instantaneously reminded Charles of the way in which the guide who had conducted him to the Spartivento palace had knocked at the garden gate. This understanding of a certain species of freemasonry which evidently prevailed with regard to secret warnings, signs, and modes of admission, only tended to confirm his suspicion that there was some deep political machination on foot.

The door was opened by a young man handsomely apparelled and of genteel appearance. He bowed slightly but respectfully to the Countess, and stood aside for her to pass. She led on through a little stone vestibule, to an inner door which she opened; and she conducted Charles into a large vaulted apartment, where at the first glance which he now swept around him he beheld thirty or forty persons assembled. They were all of the male sex; and a profound silence reigned amongst them. They were seated on common forms or benches; and at a table in front of the conclave was placed a personage of distinguished appearance, and whom Charles to his amazement recognised to be the Marquis of Ortona. Our

hero started: again his looks were swept around upon the assemblage—another surprise was in store for him—for amongst those seated on the front bench he perceived Father Falconara! But ere he had scarcely leisure to recover from this amazement, the Countess whispered in his ear, “Advance and salute the President.”

Charles mechanically obeyed; and his hand was warmly grasped by that of the Marquis of Ortona. Then Father Falconara, gliding from his seat, also pressed our hero's hand,—having done which, he returned to his place.

“You are welcome amongst us,” said the Marquis, thus repeating those words which had ere now sounded with such ominous significance from the lips of the Princess of Spartivento. “Brought hither by the same watchword which has assembled the other brethren who are so faithfully devoted to the same good cause,—a cause which numbers among its disciples, not merely the patriotic sons of Italy themselves, but likewise Poles, Hungarians, French, and English—”

“My lord,” interrupted Charles, who had now completely recovered his self-possession, “before you proceed a step further—before you commit yourself by any fresh revelations—it is my duty to inform you that some grand mistake has been made—”

“A mistake?” echoed the Marquis of Ortona; and there was a murmur of surprise amidst the conclave.

“Yes—assuredly a mistake!” pursued Charles. “I came not hither knowingly through any watch-word—”

“How is this?” exclaimed the Marquis sternly; while the murmur of surprise grew into one of disapprobation that was almost threatening. “Did you not immediately recognise and acknowledge the name that was breathed rapidly in your ear?”

“The name of the Count of Camerino,” interjected Charles. “Yes!—assuredly I know that name: and you, my Lord Marquis, must full well remember under what painful circumstances I became acquainted with the Count last winter in Naples.”

“And that name,” said the Marquis,—“knew you not that it was a watch-word and a rallying sound?”

“I knew nothing of the sort,” replied our hero. “The name—”

“Stop!” ejaculated the Marquis of Ortona, rising from his seat. “Ignatio, stand forward!”

A man, whom our hero at once recognised as the individual who had guided him thither, stepped forth from his place at the further extremity of the vaulted subterranean; and approaching the table, he bowed respectfully to the Marquis.

“Ignatio,” said this nobleman, “did you not ere now report to us that you had found an undoubted disciple in the individual who stands here—that he had acknowledged the magical influence of the watch-word, and that he had followed you?”

“Such was the report I made, my lord,” responded Ignatio; “and it was a true one.”

“True to a certain extent!” interjected Charles: “but there was a misunderstanding betwixt us. Methought that the Count of Camerino summoned me by means of an emissary, to visit him—”

“Ah!” said the Marquis; “then you are igno-

rant of the fatal catastrophe which has deprived us of our most intelligent leader and Italy of its best friend?”

“What mean you, my lord?” asked our hero. “Surely, surely, I am not to surmise the worst in reference to the Count of Camerino?”

“Alas, yes!” rejoined the Marquis: “the Count is no more! Upwards of three weeks have elapsed since he perished from the injuries sustained by an accident which occurred to his travelling-carriage.”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Charles, much affected, “that fine-spirited, magnanimous nobleman is no more!”

“He is no more,” rejoined the Marquis, in a voice of profound mournfulness. “He was journeying on business connected with the good cause, when the accident occurred which led to his death. Father Falconara sustained him in his arms as he breathed his last. From the moment the accident occurred until the spark of life was extinct—an interval of some thirty-six hours—the unfortunate Count was unconscious of everything. I should perhaps inform you that the Neapolitan Government had suddenly granted a free pardon for all past offences to the Count of Camerino; and I was expressly charged to bear that pardon to his lordship, who was supposed to be residing at the time on his estates in Tuscany. I sent off speedy messages to bid the Count meet me in Florence—but, alas! it was not destined that I should again behold him alive.”

“And thus, my lord,” said Charles, “the time came when you were to open the sealed packet entrusted to you by the Count at the close of last year, and which I delivered to you according to his instructions?”

“Rest assured, my young friend,” replied the Marquis of Ortona, “I have not forgotten that packet. I deposited it at the time in a place of security in my mansion at Naples; and I have no doubt that it contains the will of my unfortunate deceased friend. Indeed, of this there can be no doubt: for, as you yourself have reminded me, there is upon the envelope an inscription to the effect that the packet was not to be opened until the writer's death. I have sent a trusty messenger to my notary at Naples, giving him instructions how to act with regard to that packet. For immediately after the Count of Camerino's death, it became incumbent on me to journey hither without delay—so that I have not been enabled to revisit Naples since the deplorable loss of our dear friend.”

“And where was he interred?” inquired Charles.

“In the church of the town of Camerino, which is upon the immense estates possessed by the deceased in the most fertile part of Tuscany. I followed his remains to the tomb—and I shed many tears over the last action of a noble race!”

“Ah!” said Charles mournfully, as he thought of Silvio who had lived so badly and perished so miserably; “there is no heir to the noble house of Camerino!”

“There is no heir of that lineage,” said the Marquis of Ortona; “but whoever the deceased may have designated as his heir, will also associate with himself the title of Count of Camerino, inasmuch as the distinction goes with the estate. I

am not selfish—heaven knows that I am not greedy nor grasping!—but I have little doubt that my deceased friend has named me his heir. Long were we as brothers to each other; and besides, the mere fact of his entrusting his last will and testament to my keeping, sufficiently indicates the generosity of his design towards me. But why do I at present make allusion to the subject? I will tell you,” continued the Marquis, raising his voice so as to be heard by every one within that vaulted apartment. “It is because if my conjecture should prove true, and if the Camerino estates should be bequeathed unto me, I swear that all their revenues shall be devoted to the furtherance of the good cause—the emancipation of Italy from the sway of a number of petty tyrants, and the recognition of its homogeneity as a nation!”

These words were received with indications of applause, but of a cautiously subdued nature. Scarcely had they subsided, when the three peculiar knocks were given outside the door; and the Countess di Milazzo herself hastened to open it. She gave admittance to a man whose garments were travel-soiled, but whose countenance instantaneously glowed with enthusiasm as his eyes were swept around upon the conclave; and with a hasty but respectful salutation to the Marquis of Ortona, he exclaimed, “Glorious news, brethren! Everything is ripe at Leghorn for the revolt—and *there* you will be received with open arms by the populace!”

Again were the indications of applause manifested, but still in a subdued and cautious manner, — though throughout the apartment every eye flashed with enthusiasm; and as Charles De Vere happened to fling his looks upon the Countess di Milazzo, he was literally amazed by the spectacle of patriotic ardour which she presented to the view. Her eyes were magnificent in their luminousness—her cheeks glowed—her lips were parted with a triumphant smile—and she waved her kerchief in her beautifully formed hand.

All of a sudden a member of the conclave rose from his seat, and said to the Marquis of Ortona, “My lord, our enthusiasm has hurried us beyond the bounds of caution.”

There was a sudden sensation, as if everybody now all in a moment recollected something which an instant before had been forgotten; and all eyes were fixed upon Charles De Vere.

“Whatever mistake may have been made,” continued the previous speaker, “in respect to the mode whereby this English gentleman obtained admission amongst us, there can be now no mistake as to the way in which we must deal with him.”

“This is true,” said the Marquis of Ortona. “Signor De Vere, whatever the mistake may have been, you are now compromised beyond the possibility of recall; and you must swear according to the prescribed forms, to join us with heart and hand—to succour our objects with all your resources, mental, physical, and pecuniary—”

“Stop, my lord!” ejaculated our hero: “you are asking of me impossibilities! I will bind myself by oath never to reveal what I have either heard or seen in this place—”

“It is not sufficient!” ejaculated several voices, speaking menacingly. “You must join us! You must be one of us!”

“This is too much!” exclaimed our hero, almost indignantly. “I did not seek to come amongst you—I courted not the welcome which you gave—I am here through an error, which even yet has not been cleared up or explained by the man Ignatio who served as my guide—”

“Enough!” interrupted the Marquis of Ortona, speaking with a severity that might even be denominated sternness. “We have our rules and our regulations—and we are bound by our oaths to carry them out. You must join us!”

“And if I refuse?” demanded our hero.

“You will abide by the penalty,” responded the Marquis in a tone of significant warning.

“And that penalty?” asked Charles.

“Death!” was the solemn rejoinder.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE SPARTIVENTO PALACE.

FOR a moment a paleness appeared upon the countenance of Charles De Vere—but it was only for a moment; and in a firm self-possessed voice, he said, “Before God and man, I protest against the horrible iniquity of your conduct!”

“At all events,” said Father Falconara, rising from his seat, “let the cause of the error—if error it be—undergo the nicest scrutiny. We owe it to ourselves to ascertain by what means persons who have no business here can be introduced amongst us.”

“Yes,” said our hero, “let the matter be sifted to the very bottom; for with the present complexion that it wears, I feel as if I had been inveigled hither under a mere pretext to be rendered the victim of a cold-blooded murder.”

“You must not speak in this strait, signor,” said the Marquis of Ortona. “But the matter shall be investigated. Ignatio, ‘tis for you to give the first explanation.”

“Am I to speak out freely,” asked Ignatio, “in the presence of one”—and he glanced towards De Vere—who is now proved to be a stranger amongst us.”

“Yes—speak out,” replied the Marquis of Ortona; “for either he will presently become one of us or he will die!”

“My lord,” resumed Ignatio: “I may as well state for the information of any members present who do not know me, that I am one of the numerous travelling brethren whose duty it is to bear verbal information from place to place, as that the initiated may maintain a correspondence amongst themselves. Nearly a year has elapsed since I learnt, from Nino Correo in Naples, that this young gentleman”—pointing to De Vere—“was an intimate friend of the Count of Camerino. And now permit me, my lord, to ask whether I did not receive from your hand certain papers—”

“I know what you mean, Ignatio,” interjected the Marquis. “The other day, when our beloved and respected leader died, I found amongst other papers in his pocket-book three or four lists of names; and naturally concluding that these were the designations of persons devoted to our cause, I gave the papers to Ignatio that he might use them at his discretion.”

"His lordship has explained a fact," resumed Ignatio, "which led to the present mistake, if mistake it really be. Jacopo and I were engaged in delivering the summonses for the meeting here to-night, when I suddenly beheld Signor De Vere enter the Hotel de l'Europe. I recognised him at once; and it immediately occurred to me that he had come to Turin for the express purpose of taking part in the important deliberations to be held at our head-quarters here on account of our lamented leader's loss. Was it not natural that this idea should strike me? For a long time past I had believed that he was deep in the Count di Camerino's secrets; then I find his name in the lists discovered in the Count's pocket-book; and lastly I behold him in Turin at the very time when his presence, if he were really what I took him for, would be required! What, then, did I do? I waited for him in the usual manner—I exercised the wanted degree of caution!—I gave him the watch-word——"

"And did you not observe," inquired Charles, "that I did not seem altogether to comprehend the proceedings?"

"I only saw that which led me to suppose you were inclined to be cautious," answered Ignatio; "and whatsoever peculiarity there might have been in your manner, I attributed to the fact of your being an Englishman, and therefore less prompt in catching the secret signs and intimations of our fraternity than an Italian member would have been."

"And you supposed," said De Vere, "that I knew full well of the intended meeting at the Princess of Spartivento's palace? My lord," he continued, turning to the Marquis of Ortona, "the Princess can assure you that I seemed bewildered in her presence. Nay, more! the Countess di Milazzo herself can assure you that in her presence also I hesitated——"

"Enough, signor! enough!" interrupted the Marquis: "we do not doubt your word. I myself can vouch, from all I knew of you at Naples during the transactions of about a twelvemonth back, that you are a young gentleman of the highest honour, integrity, and generosity."

"And I," said Father Falconara, "can testify to the same."

"Nevertheless," continued the Marquis, "good repute will not serve you in the present emergency. There can be no doubt that a deplorable error has been committed, and that you will be the victim of that error. But there is no alternative open to us. We are bound by the most solemn and sacred oaths to carry out the laws of our institution;—and by those laws," added the Marquis, solemnly, "you must suffer death!"

The lips of Charles De Vere quivered for an instant as he thought of Agnes: but firmly compressing them, he reflected—and then he said, "How am I to die?"

"You cannot have fixed your mind upon that alternative!" exclaimed the Marquis, with grief depicted upon his countenance. "No! no! you will consent to join us! you will live to be instrumental in the establishment of Italian freedom!"

"I cannot join you," answered De Vere firmly.

"But surely, as an Englishman, your principles——"

"Are those of liberality," interjected Charles.

"But what right have I to conspire in a foreign country?"

"The true Liberal looks upon the whole world as his country," replied the Marquis: "his sympathies are not limited to any particular nation or State: they are cosmopolitan. He is the advocate of truth—and truth is universal. He is the friend of justice—and it is his duty to aid in the extirpation of injustice wherever it may be found."

"I am not even acquainted with your objects," said De Vere. "The force of the maxims which your lordship has just enunciated, I readily admit. I am also aware that Italy groans under a crushing tyranny—but might I ask whether your politics and designs present an infallible panacea for the cure of all these evils which rest like a curse upon the most beautiful region of Europe?"

"In the first place," responded the Marquis of Ortona, "our aim is to make Italy one great State, so that it shall no longer remain split into a number of different territories. Thus erected into one compact kingdom——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Charles: "then it is the monarchical system which you purpose to adopt for your renovated Italy?"

"Doubtless," replied the nobleman.

"But what if the masses of the population," said our hero, "should demand the republican form of government?"

"We would resist that demand," rejoined the Marquis, "to the very utmost!"

"Does it not occur to you, my lord, that there is somewhat of tyranny in your proceeding—and that if you mean to emancipate the people from one system only to force upon them another, you still leave them as much a prey to despotism as those nations must ever be who submit under a government in the making of which they have had no share?"

"Young gentleman," said the Marquis of Ortona, "we meet here for the carrying out of a special purpose, and not for the discussion of it. Our cause is a most holy one, and is beloved by all who enter upon it. There was our lamented friend the Count of Camerino,—he vowed, after the fatal occurrences at Naples, whereby he lost a wife and a son, that he would bid farewell to the world and all its jarring interests. But he could not long tear himself away from his old love——I mean the cause of down-trampled Italy! And thus he returned to it. Then there is Father Falconara, who has often entertained scruples lest the avocations of a minister of the gospel should be incompatible with the intrigues of a patriotic politician: but he also comes back to the rallying point when his country needs his services. And again, have we not amongst our ranks the two glorious sisters—ladies of the highest distinction, beauty, and wealth, but whose only thought is the emancipation of their country? I might name many others as illustrations of patriotic devotedness: but it will be sufficient if I conclude with an allusion to my own humble self. For I, like the rest, have everything to lose, but naught to gain, except the joyous approval of my own conscience and the delight which will be experienced when Italy shall be free."

"Not free, my lord," said Charles; "but only placed under a different system. Your speech has



THE PRINCESS SPARTIVENTO

proved that there may be much devotedness and self-sacrifice in certain quarters; but it contained no argument to convince me that the objects to which you aspire are fraught with benefit to the masses of the Italian people."

"Enough of words!" ejaculated the Marquis. "Let your decision be quickly given, Signor De Vere! Will you join us? or will you suffer those penalties which, God knows, we would willingly avert if our oaths did not prevent us from showing such mercy!"

Charles reflected for a few moments; and then he said, "Let me see the form of the oath which I may have to take."

No. 87.—AGNES.

"Behold!" said the Marquis; and he exhibited a written paper to our hero.

Charles took the document and read the contents, which ran as follow:—

"I, the undersigned, do hereby swear by everything most sacred, in heaven or on earth, as well as by my hope of eternal life, that with heart and hand I sincerely and faithfully join the Society for the Regeneration of Italy; and that I will devote all my resources, mental, physical, and pecuniary, to the welfare of Italy. I further swear that I will readily and meekly obey the orders of my superiors without gainsaying or questioning them,—that I will maintain an inviolable secrecy with

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regard to everything the revelation of which might endanger the existence of the Society or the safety of any of its members. And I likewise swear that if at any moment my opinions should change and I should repent of the course which I have taken, so that I feel I cannot conscientiously continue to be a member of the Society and an advocate of its objects, I will give due notice to the president of the section to which I may belong, or to the chief authority in the district where I may be residing; and I will hold myself bound to submit to whatever may be ordained or decreed according to the circumstances in which I shall thus be placed. And if I should violate any of these solemn obligations, I hereby declare that I shall hold myself as having become guilty of the highest crime which it is possible for man to commit; and that therefore my life will be the righteous forfeit, and whosoever shall take it will only be suitably and properly avenging the outrage offered to this patriotic brotherhood."

"I cannot take that oath," said Charles, after having carefully read the formula. "I will tell you frankly why I ere now hesitated, and why I asked to be made acquainted with the nature of the oath whereby every member is bound. It was because I thought that the terms of that oath would possibly permit me to accompany you on your intended expedition to Leghorn—but that when once we landed upon the Tuscan shore I might raise a cry to the effect that we came to give such complete freedom to the Italians as to establish the sovereignty of the people. But I see that the oath binds the members of the Society to specific objects; and it would be only an equivocation on my part to take that oath with the ulterior purpose which I have just avowed."

"You are at least frank and candid, Signor De Vere," said the Marquis of Ortona. "It is a pity that one whose principles are so lofty and whose motives of honour are so delicate, cannot be won over to the cause which we espouse."

"My lord," said Father Falconara, rising from his seat, "I beg to propose that the prisoner—for in such a light must we consider Signor De Vere—be ordered to withdraw, while we discuss the painful circumstance which has thus arisen."

"Be it so," observed the Marquis, readily adopting the priest's proposition; for in his heart he was as anxious as Father Falconara himself to find some pretext for sparing the life of De Vere.

"Come with me," said the Countess di Milazzo; and she conducted Charles out of that large vaulted apartment where the conclave was assembled.

Traversing the little vestibule, they continued their way along the passage leading towards the stairs; but the Countess stopping short, opened a door on the right hand, and which our hero had not noticed when previously passing that way.

"Be so good as to enter first," said the Countess.

All in a moment Charles asked himself, "Why should I not overpower this woman, stifle her cries with a gag, and make my escape? Need I stand upon punctilios towards one who is leagued with a set of desperadoes who have just been menacing me with death?"

He turned his eyes upon the Countess; but all in a moment the colour mantled upon his cheeks; for by the light of the lamp which she carried in

her left hand, he now perceived that she held a long naked dagger in her right; and as if she had divined his intention—or at least had penetrated the thoughts which had been flashing through his brain—she held the weapon in such a position as to prove that she was completely on her guard.

"You must not be offended, Signor De Vere," she said, with that calm self-possession mingled with modest affability, which seemed to be habitual to her: "but these are times and circumstances which render it important that those who embark in daring or desperate enterprises should be fully on their guard. You cannot therefore wonder that I should take precautions. I believe you are too courteous," she continued, with a smile, "to attempt to ill-treat a lady: but if it should happen to be otherwise, and you should by any possibility take it into your head to make a sudden attack upon me, you see that I am quite prepared to meet it. Not all your strength would avail against a thrust from this poniard, the point of which is sharp as a needle! But this is not all. Look!"

The Countess gave a slight cough, but in a peculiar manner; and a door instantaneously opened opposite the one which she had previously opened, and on the threshold of which they were both standing. Then from some obscure place four men, armed with drawn swords, and having pistols in their belts, stepped forward. They spoke not a word: but their looks for a moment flashed fiercely on Charles; and then they were bent inquiringly upon the Countess di Milazzo, as if in readiness to obey the slightest signal she might make. She waved her hand slightly; and they instantaneously disappeared, the door closing upon them—while the Countess bent a half smile of significance upon our hero,—a smile which displayed her beautiful teeth, though it was with no studied coquetry on her part.

"Now will you have the kindness to pass on?" she said: and the dagger was immediately hidden beneath the folds of her garments.

Every fresh circumstance tended to show Charles how completely he was in the power of the conspirators, and how ramified were all the precautions which they took for the ensurance of their own safety as well as the secrecy of their proceedings in the subterranean of the Spartivento palace. He therefore perceived how absolutely useless it would be for him to refuse any mandate which might be given, and which might be so easily enforced upon him. He however turned again towards the Countess, saying, "Your ladyship has complimented me by expressing the belief that courtesy would prevent me from injuring a lady; and I cannot now do better than in the spirit of reciprocity express my conviction that a lady of your rank and principles will not now deal treacherously with me."

"No—I am incapable of treachery," answered the Countess di Milazzo, with frankness and fervour. "Whatever may happen to you will be the result of a calm deliberation on the part of the conclave, and will be duly imparted."

Charles bowed an acknowledgment of the assurance; and he entered the place with which the door communicated: but it was so completely involved in obscurity that he had been unable to observe whether it were a passage, or a room, or a

mere recess. That door instantaneously closed behind him; and this circumstance appeared all in a moment to give a flat contradiction to the seemingly honest assurances he had an instant before received from the lips of the Countess.

Where was he? Utter darkness entombed him. He stretched out his arms—and his hands encountered the solid masonry on either side. He feared to advance, lest some pitfall should be at his feet; for all that he had ever heard or read that was mysterious or frightful in respect to Italian treachery or vengeance, now flashed through his brain. It was not merely a stupendous darkness, but likewise a tomb-like silence that environed him;—and now for the first time throughout the proceedings of this memorable evening he absolutely felt afraid.

He turned to feel for the door: but he could not move it. He grasped the handle—it turned—but the door itself remained fast, doubtless being locked or bolted on the other side.

"And yet," thought our hero to himself, in the endeavour to conjure up, if possible, some reassuring ideas, "they cannot mean to murder me treacherously and in darkness? Those men, though desperate in their undertakings and their position, have nevertheless certain ideas of honour and of justice. They could only slay me by virtue of a decree pronounced by themselves! Besides, have I not a friend in Father Falconara? and would not the Marquis of Ortona himself be right glad of an excuse to save me? Yet why did the Countess employ a stratagem to inveigle me hither?—why has there been something treacherous in her proceedings despite all her assurances to the contrary?"

Charles could not altogether convince himself that no ulterior perfidy was contemplated; and leaning against the wall near the door, he continued to reflect upon the position in which he was placed. Presently he became aware that a light was beginning to glimmer at a little distance: he watched it with anxiety: it grew gradually—it expanded—it began to reveal certain objects and to show in what sort of a place *De Vere* thus found himself. But what were these objects that were thus by degrees disclosing themselves? Was he in a place of the dead? was he amidst the relics of mortality? were they corpses or mere waxen effigies which were becoming more plainly visible as the light grew stronger? Was it now the aim to horrify or to affright him in order to attenuate his mind and render it more easy to be acted upon by the reasonings or the threats of the president of the conclave?

We will proceed to explanations. Charles *De Vere* found himself in a narrow passage leading into a small vaulted apartment, on the farther side of which the light was appearing. This light was produced by means of a small lamp revolving in a niche, or most likely in an aperture in the wall itself, so that it was lighted and moved by some one in an adjoining apartment. The lantern, as we ought more properly to call it, was darkened in respect to one-half of its construction; and this darkened half was in the first instance turned towards *De Vere*: but now as the lantern slowly revolved, it gradually developed the shining side; and when this part was turned full on, the movement ceased.

Against that same side of the apartment stood two sofas or couches; and on each a corpse or else a waxen effigy lay stretched. One seemed to have been a man of about forty years of age, dressed in the uniform of a general in the Sardinian service, and which by his commanding stature and fine countenance he might have been supposed to set off to immense advantage. The other figure seemed to be that of a man of about five-and-thirty years of age, also in a military uniform, but showing a rank inferior to that of the first-mentioned. The eyes of both were shut; and if they were not actual corpses, but waxen effigies, they were still meant to represent the dead. Yes—for now a more scrutinising survey of these objects showed Charles that the breast of both the blue coats bore deep stains as if indicative of blood that had flowed from wounds which had proved mortal. Besides those two sofas with the figures that lay stretched upon them, there was no other furniture in the apartment, except a praying-desk and a footstool; so that the vaulted apartment looked as if it were an oratory devoted to religious services for the dead that either lay or were represented there.

It was no sensation of terror which prevented Charles from advancing towards those objects: he was not afraid of the dead, if such they were; and if they were aught else, it were ridiculous to suppose that he could in any way care about them. But a certain sentiment of awe kept him aloof; for he felt convinced that the spectacle must be in some way associated with the stern realities which belonged to the secret proceedings of the *Spartivento* palace.

While he was still gazing upon those objects before him, the door opened, and the Countess *di Milazzo* made her appearance. Closing the door behind her, she said with a solemn look and tone, "You may have thought that I was acting treacherously towards you; but I am incapable of perfidy. Behold those waxen effigies! With a perfect—aye, with a most painful accuracy, do they represent two of the bravest officers who fought for Italian freedom in the army of Charles Albert on the fatal field of Novara! I need not tell you how the Sardinian King put himself at the head of his troops and went forth to fight the Austrian invader; nor need I tell you," added the Countess, lowering her voice to a tone of profoundest mournfulness, "how the Austrian triumphed, and how the defeat of Charles Albert was followed by his abdication. These facts belong to history—and you are acquainted with them!"

"And whom do those effigies represent?" inquired Charles, with a sensation of curiosity.

"I have already said that they were two of the bravest officers of Charles Albert's army. They possessed wives who loved them and were proud of them—who rejoiced to see them go forth to fight in the Italian cause—and who mourned over them as perished patriots when on Novara's fatal field they fought unto the very last and died rather than fly! Both were stricken by death's winged bullets in the breast; for never failed they for an instant to keep their faces towards their enemies!"

"And who were they?" again inquired Charles *De Vere*.

"The Prince of *Spartivento* and the Count of

Milazzo," was the response. There was a pause: and then the lady went on to say, "When our husbands thus perished, my sister and I vowed that we would devote ourselves to the cause of Italian freedom. Thenceforth we bade farewell to love and pleasure; and we swore that the good cause should become the idol of our worship. Ah! think not, signor, that because floods of roseate light are now pouring forth from the casements of the Spartivento palace, and that the sounds of music, the song, and the dance, are floating upon the air,—think not, I say, that my sister thus receives her friends for pleasure's sake! No!—that magnificent entertainment serves as a veil and as a blind! Little will the police-authorities conceive that while the upper part of the palace wears the appearance of joyous revelry, the subterranean are occupied by gallant patriots devising means for the liberation of their country!"

"And might I ask, signora," inquired Charles, "for what purpose those waxen effigies are placed there?—and why your noble sister and yourself thus retain the images of your departed husbands?"

"Can you not divine the purpose?" asked the Countess di Milazzo, with a look of reproachfulness: "can you not comprehend how my sister and I feel the assurance that so long as we have it in our power thus to remind ourselves of the perished patriots, we never can fail in the performance of our duty? If I saw that my sister was bestowing too much thought upon worldly pleasures, or listening with too willing an ear to the tender language breathed from masculine lips, I should take her by the hand—I should bring her hither—I should bid her gaze upon the effigy of her husband as he appeared when he fell on the fatal field of Novara—and I should adjure her to remember her oath! And she would do the same by me if on my own side I were to show that my feelings were becoming lukewarm on behalf of the grand and glorious cause."

"And might I ask your ladyship," inquired our hero, "what was your object in introducing me hither?"

"That you might fully understand the stern seriousness of the purpose cherished by my sister and myself—that you might see how resolute we are—and that you might judge of the spirit which animates all the members of the secret Society, when you find how two poor weak women are inspired by this glorious cause! Yes, Signor De Vere—my sister and I pride ourselves upon being heroines in the cause;—and I now ask whether you can any longer hesitate to embark with us in the same enterprise?"

At this moment a knock was heard at the door of the apartment; and the Countess di Milazzo hastened to answer the summons.

A whispered communication was made by some man—a member, of course, of the secret brotherhood—to the Countess di Milazzo, who looked surprised and perplexed for a moment.

"Signor De Vere," she said, at length turning towards our hero, "have you any reason to suspect that you are under the espial of the police authorities?"

"May I ask why your ladyship puts the query?" said our hero.

The Countess reflected for a few instants; and

then she replied, "There is a police-agent inquiring for you at this moment."

"Indeed?" ejaculated Charles. "Yes, signora—it is by no means surprising that this circumstance should have occurred. Nearly three hours have elapsed," he continued, glancing at his watch, "since I set foot within the Spartivento palace; and long ere this I ought to have been beyond the walls of Turin. Indeed, I pledged myself to depart within an hour——"

"What offence had you committed?" demanded the Countess quickly.

"I was about to fight a duel with another English gentleman," responded Charles; "and by some means or another information was given to the Sardinian authorities——"

"Enough! I comprehend your exact position," said the Countess. "Follow me."

They issued forth from the chamber where the waxen effigies lay; and the Countess conducted our hero into an opposite room—the one from which he had ere now beheld the armed men appear. It was dimly lighted with a lamp; and there were about a dozen individuals there, all armed to the teeth.

"Remain here until my return," said the Countess: and she accordingly left our hero in the midst of the armed posse.

Her manner towards him had been full of lady-like urbanity, blended however with the most perfect modesty of look and propriety of deportment; and the armed men, evidently taking her ladyship as their example, displayed every possible politeness towards De Vere. They offered him refreshments, of which there was a varied assortment on a side-table; some of them were smoking—they offered him cigars: but though he declined all their civilities, it was nevertheless with a proper and well-bred courtesy. In about ten minutes the Countess di Milazzo returned; and she beckoned Charles De Vere to follow her into the passage.

"Are you willing," she inquired, "to purchase your life as the result of a compromise?"

"I do not understand your ladyship," responded our hero. "A compromise is seldom consistent with the strictest principles of rectitude and honour——"

"I could propose nothing dishonourable to Signor De Vere!" interjected the Countess, with an air of dignity.

"Proceed, signora," said Charles, with a bow. "Name the terms of this compromise."

"Your life shall be spared on condition that you take temporary service beneath our banner. The oath which you are now read, shall not be exacted from you; but an oath couched in terms more general, and pledging you not to the precise politics of our party, shall be substituted. When you land at Leghorn, you shall be at liberty to raise whatever cry you think fit; and from that moment likewise you shall also be the master of your own actions."

"I understand," said De Vere. "You seek to compromise me as much as possible, in the hope that I must of necessity end by joining you altogether?"

"That is not our only aim," replied the Countess. "I frankly confess that your presence here has embarrassed us in a variety of ways. But one word!—do you accept the terms? I entreat and

conjure you to give me a favourable answer; for it has only been by straining many a point of our laws in your behalf, that the Marquis of Ortona and Father Falconara have been enabled to obtain the assent of the conclave to such conditions. If you refuse them—yes, if you refuse them, Signor De Vere," added the Countess, with some degree of emotion in her voice, "your doom is inevitable!"

"Am I to understand," demanded our hero, "that I shall be kept a prisoner until the expedition sets off?"

"It will set off this very night," replied the Countess. "You will proceed straight to Genoa; and thence you will at once sail for Leghorn."

"May I write letters to some friends, to make them easy in reference to my absence and disappearance?"

"You can write letters on condition that their contents be perused—not from any miserable purpose of curiosity—but as a guarantee—"

"Good heavens!" cried Charles indignantly; "how desperate must be the hopes and fortunes of your cause, that whichever way you turn you are compelled to suspect treachery and take all the guarantees which are suggested by the deepest mistrust!"

"It is so with all conspiracies and all conspirators," said the Countess di Milazzo, in a cold tone, and with a corresponding look.

"I will write no letters," said Charles. "Rather would I leave my friends and relations to the tortures of suspense, than submit myself to the indignity of such a *surveillance* in respect to correspondence. But it is thoroughly agreed that the moment I set foot on the shore of Leghorn I may raise the cry of entire freedom for the Italian people?—and if it be not responded to, I may throw down my sword and refuse to fight on behalf of the cause which you espouse? Nay, more—I may to the best of my ability effect my escape, and all connexion between myself and your secret society shall be considered to be at an end? Is it so?"

"This is the bargain," answered the Countess.

Charles reflected for a few moments. There, on the one hand, was the threat of death on the part of those desperadoes: and there, on the other, was a compromise by means of which he might ensure his eventual safety. He decided upon accepting the latter; and he now signified his intention to the Countess di Milazzo.

"Welcome, welcome amongst us!" she exclaimed, her beautiful countenance flushing with enthusiasm; and she grasped our hero's hand as she spoke.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

UP-STAIRS AGAIN.

ONCE more did the Countess bid Charles De Vere await her return for a few minutes; and again was he consigned to the place which we may denominate the guard-room. But in a little while the beautiful and energetic heroine reappeared; and now she conducted him into the vaulted chamber where the two waxen effigies lay.

Charles found the Marquis of Ortona and Father Falconara there; and they both pressed his hands with a warmth and an eagerness which showed how delighted they were at being enabled to congratulate him on having saved his life.

"I am about to administer an oath," said the Marquis, "which you cannot object to take, inasmuch as it is perfectly consistent with the terms already explained by the Countess di Milazzo."

The Countess had quitted the chamber for a moment: but she now returned, accompanied by two of the members of the secret conclave; and they held drawn swords crossed over our hero's head while the Marquis dictated the following oath:—

"I swear by everything sacred in heaven and on earth, and by all my hopes of future happiness, that from the present moment until my foot shall rest upon the Tuscan shore at Leghorn, I will do naught to molest, frustrate, or controvert the purposes of the Secret Society for the Regeneration of Italy, and that in all things I will obey the superiors of the contemplated expedition so long as they command me to undertake nothing inimical to the conditions of the compact whereon this oath is based. I furthermore swear that I will not attempt to quit the ranks of the brotherhood, nor by my own will sever myself from them, until my arrival at Leghorn—or unless a severance be produced by forcible and irresistible circumstances. I swear to maintain secrecy in respect to the proceedings so long as secrecy may be needful to the interests of the cause itself or to the safety of the members embarked in it. And in case of the violation of this oath, or of any of its parts, I hold that my life will become righteously forfeit; and that any members of this Society will be justified in inflicting capital punishment upon me, so that it will not be a murder that is thus perpetrated, but a proper retribution that will have been accomplished."

While the Marquis of Ortona was reading the formula of this oath, which had been committed to paper, Charles found that his attention was gradually being drawn towards the countenance of one of the men who held the drawn swords over his head. It occurred to him that he had seen this man's face before. He looked again, without seeming to be thus paying any particular regard to the individual: stronger in his mind grew the conviction that the countenance was known to him; but where he had before seen it, he could not recollect. There was something in the gaze of the man himself which seemed to corroborate the idea that they were no strangers to each other: but fruitlessly did Charles rack his brain to recall to mind where it was that they had before met.

The oath having been read over to him, he saw nothing in the formula from which he felt himself justified in dissenting: he therefore repeated it, saying at the end, "All this I swear to observe, as I hope for salvation for my soul!"

"Amen!" said Father Falconara.

The two men with the drawn swords retired; and the Marquis of Ortona at once said to De Vere, "You have taken an oath of the most solemn character, in the presence of these representations of the two great patriots who died for the cause of Italian freedom. To a young gentleman

of your honour and integrity, of your excellent principles and high-mindedness, I need not say that I hope you will respect that oath as devoutly as if it were sworn with your hands placed upon the breasts of the veritable corpses of the deceased patriots!"

"Whatever I have undertaken to perform, shall be accomplished!" said De Vere. "Life is sweet, my lord; and in order to save mine I have accepted the conditions which you had the power to impose."

"And you have acted wisely," said the Marquis.

"I know," rejoined Charles, with a look expressive of fervid gratitude, "that to your lordship and Father Falconara I am indebted for my life—"

"Aye—and to the Countess di Milazzo also," said the Marquis emphatically.

A slight blush crossed the beautiful countenance of the Italian lady: but instantaneously regaining her self-possession, she said in her usual composed, placid manner, "Come with me, Signor De Vere. I am about to put you to the test. You are to obey the orders of your superiors; and the Marquis of Ortona will now tell you that you are to receive these orders from my lips."

"Assuredly so," said the Marquis.

Charles bowed an acknowledgment of the authority; and he followed the Countess from the chamber where the waxen effigies lay. She led him along the passage: they reached the staircase—the Countess grasped the handle attached to the wheel fixed against the wall of masonry—and as she turned that wheel, the moveable part of the floor was seen to open overhead. They ascended; and once more was he in the apartment lighted by the lamp fed with perfumed oil.

"You will remain here for a few minutes—will you not?" said the Countess, with an amiable smile.

Charles bowed an assent; and the lady left the apartment. Our hero might now escape if he thought fit:—he had nothing to do but to open that door and join the crowd of guests, amongst whom he might find some whose aid he could invoke to save him from recapture by any of the desperado band: or he might escape by the window. But no!—he dared do nothing of all this: the oath which he had taken withheld him—and he was too honourable to violate it!

In a few minutes the door opened, and the two sisters made their appearance. The Countess di Milazzo at once descended into the subterranean, the moveable part of the floor closing over her head; while the Princess di Spartivento said, with an air of mingled condescension and affability, "Be so kind as to give me your arm."

Charles at once complied with this request, and the Princess, leaning lightly on his arm, said, "My sister is compelled to rejoin the conclave below; but she has informed me exactly how matters stand—and therefore instead of taking your instructions from her lips, you will be so good as to receive them from mine."

"Provided that they are consistent with the conditions of the compact," replied our hero; "and that they enjoin the performance of nothing repugnant to my feelings."

"Fear not that your opinions or sentiments

will be in any way outraged," answered the Princess.

She led him forth from the apartment: they descended the staircase, and reached the little vestibule which Charles had first entered on his arrival at the palace.

"You are about to see the police-agent," said the Princess; "and you may truthfully inform him that your visit to me this evening has delayed your departure, but that you are fully determined to set off at midnight—for which purpose you empower him to order a postchaise to come and take you up here. Your luggage can be sent from the hotel; and my steward shall call there in the morning to defray the expenses you may have contracted."

Charles now bitterly repented that he had taken the oath; and he could not avoid a gesture and an expression of vexation. The Princess flung upon him a glance of inquiry.

"I have acted foolishly, signora!" he said; "and your Highness's sister has played her part with a policy which has successfully outwitted me."

"What mean you?" inquired the Princess.

"I mean," responded Charles, with bitterness in his accents, "that the visit of this police-agent to your palace to inquire for me, might have been the means of my safety and rescue—and I ought to have availed myself of the incident. I have played my cards badly!"

"I hesitate not to confess," said the Princess, "that the visit of this agent might have been most embarrassing for us."

"Yes!" exclaimed our hero; "for he would have insisted upon seeing me—he would have taken no excuse—you must have produced me; and then I could have at once claimed his protection!"

"You need not be angry with yourself," said the Princess calmly: "for you could not have acted more prudently than you have done. No doubt the incident was embarrassing; but you are wrong to think that we should have produced you. No!—we would rather have incurred any risk than have placed ourselves so completely in your power. Repine not at the course you have adopted; for you have assuredly saved your life thereby."

The Princess of Spartivento spoke with a calm confidence blended with a gracious condescension; and her voice was full of a golden harmony. We have already said that she was of a grand and striking beauty; her age was only twenty-six; and it must have been difficult for any young man to gaze upon her without tender emotion. Equally difficult were it for an admirer of the fair sex to contemplate her sister the Countess without a sense of fascination. But Charles De Vere was passing through the ordeal without the slightest infidelity to the image of his beloved Agnes. It should however be mentioned that the looks of the Princess of Spartivento were as replete with modesty as those of her sister had been.

"Now," said the Princess, when that little colloquy in the vestibule was ended, "we will repair to the room where the police-agent is waiting your appearance."

She opened the door: they proceeded along a passage which led into the great hall of the man-

sion. There numerous lacqueys were lounging about on all sides, and some of the company were moving up and down the grand marble staircase,—some having visited the refreshment-rooms, and others repairing thither. The Princess conducted De Vere to a small sitting-room, where our hero at once recognised the agent of police who had waited upon him at the Hotel de l'Europe.

"I was determined to satisfy myself," said the Princess, affecting to laugh gaily, "whether my friend Signor De Vere could possibly be under the surveillance of the police—and whether he is so wickedly disposed," she added, now flinging an arch smile upon Charles, "as to contemplate a duel."

"Then Signor De Vere must himself have given your Highness these particulars," said the police-agent, with a low bow, "for I assuredly did not betray them."

"Oh, yes," exclaimed the Princess, laughing. "Signor De Vere made no secret of the matter—though he might naturally feel indignant at having been the object of espial on your part——"

"It is a habit we have in this city," said the police-agent, with a dry cough. "No doubt, Signor De Vere knows that well enough; for he is intimately acquainted with Italian customs. When once the police authorities have ordered any one to do a particular thing, they keep a vigilant eye over him until he does it. And now, Signor De Vere, with your permission I should like to speak a few words with you alone."

"What! am I in the way?" said the Princess, smiling. "If so, I am sure I would not for the world intrude another moment."

With these words, spoken with an air of cheerful good-nature and indifference, the Princess left the apartment, without so much as thinking it worth while to cast a significant look upon our hero.

Charles remained alone with the police-agent, who at once said, "You have not fulfilled your word, signor. At seven o'clock you were to have left Turin: it is now past nine, and you are still here."

"My good fellow," replied our hero, "can you not make allowances for one who when calling to take his leave of a beautiful lady, finds that she is entertaining company and is inveigled into joining the guests?"

"Very good, signor," replied the agent; "I will make all allowances—for the Princess is very beautiful—and so is her sister the Countess di Milazzo. Besides, I do not want to spoil sport; only I thought it highly necessary just to call and remind you of your promise; because the other Englishman—Signor Hardress—cannot be liberated till you leave Turin, and he is getting exceedingly impatient. I know what these syrens are—this Princess and this Countess; and I thought that if they had once got you within the range of their fascinations, you would forget all about your pledge to depart and your fellow-countryman who is in prison."

"I have forgotten nothing of all this," replied De Vere. "I will leave exactly at midnight. Will that suffice?"

"It must suffice, since you so wish it," responded the official; "and after all, it is only a matter of a few hours in respect to the release of

your fellow-countryman. But you must not think you are making a dupe of me, Signor De Vere," continued the agent, with a sly smile, "when you tell me that you purposely set out from your hotel to pay a farewell visit to the Spartivento palace."

"What mean you?" inquired De Vere, steadily and unflinchingly meeting the keen scrutinizing gaze of the official.

"I simply mean this, signor," pursued the latter,—"that I saw it all—I was watching you from a distance—you were invited to come here. Of course it is no business of mine—but I know the goings on at the Spartivento palace."

"Ah!" thought Charles within himself: "then the whole conspiracy is discovered, and perhaps I shall be arrested along with the others!"—but his countenance betrayed naught of the internal agitation which he thus experienced; yet it was with an indescribable suspense that he waited for what the man might next say.

"Of course," continued this individual, "I am not a member of the police without knowing a thing or two more than ordinary people."

"What do you mean?" demanded Charles. "You spoke of these ladies as syrens——"

"Well, signor, and have you not found them to be such?" said the agent, with a sly look. "You admit that they have kept you here for hours beyond the time when you promised to leave Turin—and that now you do not purpose to depart until midnight——"

"These ladies render their hospitalities very agreeable," said Charles.

"No doubt of it!" rejoined the agent, with another sly look. "Perhaps you flatter yourself that you are the first lover the Princess has had since the death of her husband?"

"Ah!" thought Charles; "perhaps, after all, there is nothing to be frightened at, and this fellow is altogether on a wrong scent!"

It now occurred to our hero that the police official had been drinking, and that though not particularly intoxicated, he was assuredly not quite sober—and hence the tittle-tattling strain in which he was talking.

"The truth is," pursued the man, now winking his eyes in a knowing fashion, "those two sisters are in reality the most profligate women in all Turin."

"No—I cannot believe it!" exclaimed Charles, a flush of generous indignation glowing upon his countenance.

"But I tell you, signor, it is the fact! The police know better than the world in general. The world in general believes those ladies to be virtuous: the police know to the contrary. But the police keeps its own secret. It has nothing to do with the private pursuits or pleasures of individuals; and therefore the police tells no tales, but leaves the world in general to think just what it likes."

"Are you sure that you are not libelling the characters of two virtuous ladies?" asked Charles sternly.

"I am certain that I am doing nothing of the sort. I have seen handsome young men introduced stealthily over and over again into the Spartivento palace—just as you, signor, were introduced here this evening; and you best can tell whether you were invited here for the mere sake

of listening to a concert or joining in a dance. Besides, on what excellent terms the Princess was with you, signor, just now when she brought you into the room. Well, well! it is no business of mine——"

"But you seem to be making it your business," said Charles sternly. "And now what is all this gossip and tittle-tattle to lead to?"

"To lead to? Why, to nothing, signor. I said just now it is no business of mine; but somehow or another the subject has grown on us—and I could only conclude by recommending that you do not suffer the fascinations of the Princess to retain you here beyond midnight."

"I shall depart at midnight," said our hero, with a stern courtesy. "You can order me a post-chaise, if you will. It may take me up at the gate of the Spartivanto place——"

"I will come with it myself, signor," said the agent.

"Thank you, I would rather not," interjected Charles. "Do you think I want every one to know that I am hunted about by the police? Send me the chaise, and let my portmanteau be placed inside. Here is money to liquidate my expenses at the hotel: the surplus you will keep for yourself. And now depart."

"I bid you farewell, signor. I envy you! You will presently be a happy man in the arms of the Princess——"

"Silence! a truce to this ribald scandal on your part!" exclaimed our hero sternly.

"Ah, well, signor, it is all very generous and honourable; but it does not make me your dupe. I tell you these two ladies are visited by more lovers than even that famous Marchioness was—— you know whom I mean——the one who died so horribly the other day at Florence."

Having thus spoken, the official took up his hat, made a bow, and retired. Just as the door closed behind him, a large picture, about seven feet high, and standing only about a foot from the floor, opened as a door; and the Princess came forth from an inner room which was thus disclosed to the view of our hero.

"You are a man of the most scrupulous honour," she said to De Vere, as she proffered him her hand.

"What! is it possible?" he asked, "you have heard——"

"Everything that has taken place," replied the Princess; and the blood mantled over her superb countenance, upon her neck, and upon her bosom.

"Oh, signora!" cried Charles, "I dared not breathe a single syllable in vindication of characters which I knew to be so foully aspersed!"

"You said as much as you dared," answered the Princess, bending upon him a look full of gratitude, but still with a blush upon her cheeks;—"and far more than, as strangers to you, I and my sister had any right to expect."

"The female character, when wrongfully accused," rejoined Charles, "always ought to enlist the chivalrous sympathy of a male defender. But if I had spoken a syllable more than I did say on your behalf——"

"You would have betrayed everything!" interjected the Princess. "Ah, signor, I fully appreciate the noble generosity of your conduct; and I shall not fail to represent it presently to my sister.

Alas, that our fair fame should thus be libelled by a brutal ruffian! But it is one of the penalties which patriotism has to pay for its fervour and its sincerity. Ah! it is better that the police should read the word *lovers* instead of *conspirators*! And not only do I thank you, signor," pursued the Princess, "for your generous conduct in reference to my sister and myself: I may likewise compliment you on the strict honour and integrity with which you have fulfilled your oath. I had not the slightest hesitation in trusting you alone with the police-agent: I knew you were a man of honour!"—and the handsome dark eyes of the Princess were fixed with admiration upon the countenance of our hero.

"Even though my oath be extorted from me by the force of circumstances," said Charles, "I can nevertheless respect it. And now, Princess, if my conduct throughout has given you such satisfaction—and if you can place such implicit reliance on my integrity—why may I not be suffered to go free? why must I be held to the terms of that oath? One word from you to the secret conclave would ensure my manumission!"

"Not so, signor," said the Princess; and it appeared to be with an expression of mournful regret that she shook her head. "It would please me much to do aught that lay in my power to serve you: but herein I am powerless. The Society will not part from one whom it hopes to enrol permanently in its ranks. It is not the first time that persons have entered those ranks unwillingly, and as the result of circumstances which were accidental, or at least involuntary on their part: and they have ended by becoming staunch supporters and advocates of the good cause. This is a calculation of which the Society never loses sight; and it will not depart from its rule in your case. Besides, signor, a point has already been strained to save your life—and you must ask no more!"

"If you assure me that the request is useless," replied Charles, "it were idle for me to continue to urge it!"

"It is useless," said the Princess; and again she bent upon him a look that was replete with compassionate interest: then, as her countenance suddenly fired up with an enthusiastic glow, she exclaimed, "Oh, chivalrous-minded Englishman! I am confident that you will enter with spirit into our cause! You will accompany us to-night with the resolve to play a noble part!"

"What?" ejaculated Charles: "do I understand your Highness aright? Is it the intention of yourself and your sister to accompany the expedition?"

The Princess cast upon him for a moment a look as if she were surprised at the query; and then she said, "Do you think, signor, that we should remain absent when the spark is to be set to that system of trains which are ramified throughout Italy? No, no! we shall not be absent! But come—you may stand in need of refreshments—and then you must return to the conclave, who will be expecting you."

The Princess again took De Vere's arm; and they issued forth from the parlour where this conversation had taken place. Instantaneously changing the discourse to light and general topics, the Princess talked gaily and in a very friendly manner with De Vere as they crossed the spacious



THE COUNTESS DI MILAZZO.

ball in the direction of the rooms where the refreshments were served. Just as they were about to enter that suite of apartments, De Vere was seized with sudden surprise on beholding Floribel leaning upon the arm of a very handsome young man wearing a rich military uniform. At the same moment Floribel recognised our hero, and the Princess at once perceived that they were acquainted with each other.

"You know that lady?" said her Highness.

"Yee—I know her. She is——At least I forget her name:" for Charles was more or less confused and bewildered at beholding her there: he knew not by what name she was passing—and he did not wish to say anything that might compromise her.

"Ah, I see that your acquaintance with her is slight," said the Princess. "She is a Madame Lovel. Captain St. Didier brought her hither, and presented her to me."

No. 88.—AGNES.

By this time the two couples met; and Floribel, at once giving her hand to Charles, exclaimed, "Why, who would have thought of seeing you here?"

"No! doubtless you did not expect to see me here!" answered our hero, with a meaning look. "You fancied that by this time I had left Turin."

The tell-tale blush upon Floribel's cheeks showed De Vere that his conjecture was right; and he said, "I understand it all: but I give you credit for a good intention."

"I am glad to hear you speak thus," said Floribel. "Presently, when you are disengaged, I will say a few words to you."

"At once, if you think fit," said our hero. "Her Highness will grant me permission——"

"Assuredly," said the Princess, with an amiable smile. "Captain St. Didier shall give me his arm until you rejoin me, Signor De Vere."

Charles gave his arm to Floribel, and conducted

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her into the long passage branching off from the hall, and where they might be comparatively alone together.

"How is it that I find you here?" he at once inquired.

Floribel blushed—hesitated—and then answered, "Captain St. Didier introduced me."

"Captain St. Didier, Floribel?" said Charles in a reproachful manner. "And who is Captain St. Didier? what is he to you that he should be intimate enough to introduce you here?"

Again did Floribel blush—again did she look confused for a few moments; and then suddenly recovering her self-possession, as well as the fortitude which was necessary for one in her false position, she said, "You have already conjectured in your own mind what Captain St. Didier may be to me; and it is therefore cruel of you to seek to draw out the statement word for word and syllable for syllable from my lips."

"My God, Floribel!" cried Charles, "is it possible that you are fixed in pursuing a career of—of—"

"And pray," she added, with a cold air, "how is it that I find your very virtuous, delicate, and over-scrupulous Mr. De Vere on the most familiar and intimate terms with the Princess of Spartivento?"

"Floribel!" he ejaculated, half indignant, half reproachfully.

"It is useless for you to deny it," she immediately rejoined, in a positive tone. "Was not the Princess leaning upon your arm,—her dark eyes bent admiringly upon you—her smiles disclosing her pearly teeth—her voice of golden harmony wafting joyous language to your ear—"

"The urbanity of a hostess," interjected Charles, "towards a guest whom she was pleased to distinguish with more than the usual honour."

"Oh, Charles!" cried Floribel, "do you think I am so ignorant of the world as to receive for gospel such an explanation as this? At the very outside you could have only known the Princess of Spartivento two or three hours; and such a degree of intimacy as that which unquestionably exists between you—"

"I entertained the hope, Floribel," interrupted Charles, gravely, "that you knew enough of me to be convinced—"

"I have seen so much of the world," said Floribel vehemently, "that I believe in nothing which is not fully proven to me. I have told you how I came hither. I have passed under the protection of Captain St. Didier; and he begged me to accompany him this evening to this palace, to which he has a general invitation. I will tell you candidly that I was in no particular humour to plunge amidst scenes of gaiety after the information you had given me that Agnes has found a father and that I have an uncle living,—a father whom she must love—an uncle whom I must fear! I would rather have remained in the solitude of my chamber, to reflect upon all these things: but St. Didier pressed me—and I came. I need not tell you, Charles, that people are not so particular on the Continent as they are in England, and that even in the very best society persons may find an entrance who would vainly seek the same privilege in our own native land. St. Didier's presentation was therefore sufficient; and I was smilingly welcomed by her Highness. I have now told you

the truth as it regards myself. I pray you to be equally candid towards me, and tell me how it is that I find you at the Spartivento palace, which, as you rightly concluded, I thought you were preparing to depart from Turin."

"I can give you no other explanation," responded Charles, "than that I was invited hither—and I came. If you do not know enough of my principles to believe that I am incapable of an act of infidelity to Agnes, you must at least have sufficient faith in my honour to be assured that I would not pledge my sacred word to a falsehood. But I swear to you, most solemnly—by everything I deem sacred—that no impure thought has entered my head in reference to the Princess of Spartivento, and that the conduct of her Highness towards me has been perfectly consistent with the modesty and dignity of a distinguished lady."

"I must believe you, Charles!" said Floribel; and then looking round, and lowering her voice, she added, "Nevertheless, I deem it right to give you a warning. Although the demeanour of the Princess has hitherto been correct towards you, yet as a man of the world you cannot do otherwise than mistrust that extreme friendliness of manner which she was displaying as she leant upon your arm. For my part I have much reason to believe, from what I have heard, that she and her sister are two wantons."

"Again this calumny!" mentally ejaculated our hero: and then he asked, "What reason have you for entertaining such a belief?"

"I will tell you," replied Floribel. "Something has come to the ears of the Sardinian Government which has induced the Minister of the Interior to request that Captain St. Didier would institute a watch over the proceedings in this mansion. He came hither this evening for that purpose; and he requested me to accompany him the better to guarantee his visit against any suspicion."

"And what is it that has thus been heard?" inquired Charles, inwardly agitated and suddenly filled with anxious suspense.

"It is positive that a great number of young men secretly visit the palace at night," said Floribel; "and therefore the two sisters must either be gallant ladies who carry on various amours, or else they are engaged in a conspiracy. These alternatives suggest the only solution of the mystery."

"Ah! is it so?" said De Vere, assuming a somewhat careless manner. "But surely your Captain St. Didier beholds nothing here, in this festive scene, to justify either suspicion?"

"No," rejoined Floribel. "But this very evening he has managed to introduce a spy into the house. Of course all that I am telling you is perfectly confidential, and intended only as a friendly warning; but I need not give you such an injunction—for I do indeed think too well of you, after all you have said, to suppose that you would surrender to the wiles and blandishments of the Princess of Spartivento—while as for your engaging in a conspiracy, I am sure that such an idea is simply ridiculous."

"And that spy whom the Captain has introduced," said De Vere,—"is he amongst the assembled company?"

"Oh, no! But I do not exactly know where

he is—neither does St. Didier himself. He has not seen the man since he sent him hither this evening; but he of course expects to receive some information presently. Ah! I recollect!—and the coincidence is singular! This spy of whom we are talking is a Florentine—he was one of Count Ramorino's most able and trusty agents."

A sudden light flashed in unto the brain of Charles De Vere; and he could scarcely prevent himself from giving vent to an ejaculation. He however succeeded in retaining a profound silence.

"Captain St. Didier told me all this just now," pursued Floribel. "For my part—though I know nothing of the Princess and her sister—I should scarcely think they are engaged in a conspiracy: I should be much more inclined to believe that the persons who have been secretly admitted into their mansion are gallants with whom they carry on their amours."

"Well, doubtless time will prove," said Charles, carelessly, as if the matter were one of no particular moment to himself. "And now, Floribel, can I once more venture to entreat—"

"If you are about to revert to the old story, Charles," interrupted the young lady,—“and if you mean to read me a lecture, it is useless, I can assure you! I beseech you therefore to quit the subject at once. My career is ruled by destiny itself. Let us now separate. I must rejoin St. Didier. He is not jealous of you,” she added, with a smile; “for I have already told him sufficient to make him understand how you and I can be intimate together—”

"And also," added De Vere, "why you chose that I should not fight a duel with Hector Hardress?"

"Yes. You cannot blame me. It was for your own sake and for the sake of your Agnes that I sought to prevent this duel. You cannot think that I entertained a moment's concern on behalf of Mr. Hardress. And now, Charles, farewell."

She gave him her hand; and murmuring in an impassioned tone, "May you and Agnes be happy!" she hastened away from him.

Charles paced to and fro in the corridor for some few minutes after Floribel had left him; and then he returned into the grand hall, where he beheld the Princess descending the staircase.

"I need not ask you, signor," she said, as she joined him, "whether you have adhered to your oath. All the former tenour of your conduct has been such as to leave my mind entirely at rest on that score."

"The confidence of your Highness is not misplaced," responded our hero. "I will give you a proof of it. Here is a letter which I am most anxious should be delivered to the Hon. Hector Hardress in the course of to-morrow. I might have given it to Madame Lovel, requesting her to forward it, but I considered that by so doing I should be violating one of your Society's laws, and consequently breaking to a certain extent the oath which I have taken. I will now ask you to take measures that it shall reach its destination. You shall read its contents; for you are acquainted with the English language. I must open it, because there is some little alteration which circumstances render it necessary I should make in its contents. I have therein told Hardress that he is

to meet me in a day or two in France: but I must now request that he will lose no time in returning to Florence, where he shall next hear of me."

"You speak as if you were determined to desert us at Leghona?" said the Princess: and she led the way into the parlour where the interview with the police-agent had now taken place. "But I am convinced, on the other hand, you will end by joining us heart and soul."

"We shall see," said Charles curtly: and he sat down at the table, on which there were writing materials.

Having altered his letter, so as to suit the different circumstances in which he was now placed, he handed it to the Princess,—who said, "I am bound to make myself acquainted with its contents in order that I may report accordingly to the Marquis of Ortona presently.—It is well, Signor De Vere," she said, after a brief pause; and she gave him back the letter. "Re-seal it—and I promise you that it shall reach Mr. Hardress to-morrow."

When this matter was concluded, the Princess led the way back to the apartment where the lamp with the perfumed oil was burning; and she touched a secret spring, which caused a bell to ring down below. Almost immediately afterwards the table in the centre began to move—the floor opened—and the Countess di Milozza made her appearance. She beckoned Charles De Vere to descend; and as he followed her down the mysterious staircase, the Princess of Spartivento returned to join her guests.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE SPY.

THE Countess asked our hero to explain what had taken place between himself and the police official; but he simply assured her that everything had progressed in that quarter with due regard to the oath he had taken and the safety of the secret Society. She conducted him into the guard-room, with the request that he would wait there until the conclave should desire his presence; and she herself hastened to rejoin that assembly.

There were now only three or four persons in the guard-room; and amongst them were the two who had held the swords over De Vere's head when he took the oath in the chamber of the waxen figures. His eyes settled upon one of those two men; and he ejaculated to himself, "Yes—'tis he!"

He was deliberating whether he should address the individual or not, when the man of his own accord accosted him; and drawing him aside, said, "I have now at length an opportunity of expressing a hope that there is no ill-will between Signor De Vere and myself?"

As the man thus spoke, Charles noticed that several of his front teeth were missing; and he failed not to recollect how he had dashed them out on knocking the fellow down on the occasion of the gross insult which he levelled against him at the gate of the British Embassy.

"Ah, I thought I recollected you!" said De

Vere. "Yes, I thought so when you were just now holding the sword above my head! But in reference to past incidents, I cherish no ill-will towards you if you harbour none towards me."

"For whatsoever offence I gave you at the time, signor," answered the man, "I was well punished;"—and he pointed to his mouth. "Therefore, as everything is all square between us, and we find ourselves thrown together in this place, and under these peculiar circumstances, we ought to be good friends."

"I repeat," said De Vere, "there is no rancour on my part:—therefore let us speak in all frankness and good humour, as if there had been naught unpleasant in our past acquaintance. What is your name?"

"Fossano," replied the man, "at your service."

"And how on earth came you to be mixed up in these affairs," pursued De Vere,—"you whose avocation might rather be supposed to consist in the detection of plots than complicity in them?"

"Well, it might seem singular to you, signor—being a foreigner and a stranger as you are——"

At this moment the door opened; and another armed man entered the guard-room, saying, "You may get yourselves in residences, my friends; for in a very few minutes the president will want members to pair off in the usual manner."

"Ah!" said Fossano, in a low tone: "matters are approaching a crisis!"

"What do you mean?" inquired Charles.

"I mean that you will presently find yourself so deeply compromised, that with all your intentions of ultimate escape when you arrive at Leghorn—which intentions I know that you harbour—you will find yourself so inextricably involved in the tangled meshes, that it will be impossible for you to discover your fortunes from the deperate fates of the rest."

The man spoke in so low a tone and with so much studied precaution, that his words reached no ears besides those of Charles, who gazed upon him attentively as he spoke.

"What meant that person who has just now entered," he asked, "by observing that the president would shortly compel the whole party to pair off?"

"I will tell you," said Fossano. "Do you happen to know that it is one peculiar feature of the system pursued at the galleys and in the convict depots, to chain the galley-slaves in pairs—two and two together—so that no individual shall be capable of isolated or separate action? Thus every one drags about with him a person who is like his shadow—who by necessity becomes aware of all his actions—and from whom it is scarcely possible even to conceal his secret thoughts. Well, experience has shown that this process of indiscriminately throwing a mass of human beings into pairs—chaining them two and two together—establishes countless guarantees for the security and safety of the whole multitude. You might think that every individual would find in his companion a ready accomplice in whatsoever designs he himself might concert or harbour: but it is not so. Instead of accomplices, nine-tenths become spies."

"I can understand how all this is entirely possible—nay, even probable," responded De Vere:

"but I scarcely see how you mean what you have said to become an illustration of existing circumstances."

"Surely you must have seen how ramified are the precautions which the members of this Society take to ensure the fidelity and good faith of those who join them?"

"Ah!" ejaculated De Vere. "And is it possible that the principle which works so well amongst galley-slaves, is applied to an assemblage of persons calling themselves honourable patriots?"

"Yes, the principle is so applied:" and there was a peculiar sneer upon Fossano's lip, at the same time that from beneath his eyebrows he scrutinized our hero's countenance.

An expression of disgust appeared upon Charles's handsome features, as he mused upon the intelligence he had just received.

"It must indeed be galling to a young gentleman such as you are," continued Fossano, "to be placed in such a position. But I will help you to escape from the whole affair—and that right speedily."

"Ah!" said Charles, assuming an aspect of mingled gratitude and interest. "Is this possible?"

"Hush! talk not so loud! In such a place as this the walls have ears! When we go into the hall where the convuls are assembled, do you keep close by my side—but not as if it were with any settled purpose—and we shall thus be paired."

"Before I promise to do so," said Charles, "let me learn a little of your hopes and prospects—ay, and of your intentions also. If you mean to aid me in escaping, you must mean to escape yourself?"

"Such is my intention," replied Fossano. "But no matter what my motive may be. Let it suffice for you to have the assurance that instead of waiting till you reach Leghorn to leave the band, you shall perhaps be enabled to separate from it this very night."

"But there is the oath?" said De Vere.

"Ah, the oath!" observed Fossano, with a scornful smile. "Did it not stipulate that you would not of your own free will and accord, sever yourself from the ranks of the society? But as a matter of course it made allowance for forcible circumstances against which you might vainly struggle. Well, what if those circumstances arise—there will be no violation of the oath on your part——"

"True!" said our hero. "But on the other hand, if these circumstances be brought about by any treacherous proceeding, dealing, or connivance on my part——"

"Ask me no further questions," interrupted Fossano; "seek not to penetrate any deeper into my views—and you will not be afterwards troubled with any scruples of conscience."

Charles was nevertheless about to put some additional queries, when the door of the guard-room again opened; and another armed man made his appearance, saying, "Brethren, the president demands your attendance in the hall."

Fossano bent a rapid look of significance upon De Vere, who replied by a similar glance of meaning; and he walked by that man's side from the guard-room. On reaching the hall where the meeting was held, Charles found that all the per-

sons there assembled had risen from their seats, and were forming themselves into two ranks. The Countess di Milazzo was no longer present amongst the conclave.

Fossano quickly motioned for De Vere to take his place in one rank, while he posted himself in the other. One rank retreated to one side of the room—the other placed itself opposite; and then a deep silence prevailed.

"Brethren," said the Marquis of Ortona, rising from his presidential chair, "his Reverence Father Falconara will now invoke a blessing upon the enterprise we are about to undertake."

The priest, who was stationed near the president, and had not taken a place in either rank, stood forward and prayed impressively for a few minutes. The Marquis of Ortona then gave the word to pair off. The ceremony commenced by both ranks defiling towards the front of the presidential chair, and then passing down the room: so that every man in one rank became the comrade of one correspondingly placed in the other rank, until the process was exhausted,—there being precisely the same number of persons in each rank. And, as Fossano had foreseen, Charles De Vere became his comrade.

Our hero knew that he thus paired off with the spy; and he was curious—nay, more, he was anxious to see how the man would now act, and what would follow. The leaders of the party gathered near the presidential chair and deliberated earnestly with the Marquis of Ortona: the remainder of the conclave resumed their seats, or lounged about:—but be it understood that every pair now remained together. And thus they were bound to remain with the most scrupulous persistence—on no pretext to lose sight of one another—to listen to everything that might be said to each other—in short, to enact the part alike of friends and spies, accomplices, and custodians, reciprocally and mutually. Let the reader conceive a number of persons thus joined two and two, and the whole welded into a compact mass; and he may conceive how all the precautions which human foresight could take were thus adopted to ensure the faithful cohesion of all the parts and guard against the falling-away or failure of any one of them.

Charles De Vere purposely drew his companion a little aside, and said to him, "What is now to be done?"

"Leave it all to me," answered Fossano: "take no notice of what you may see me do, and everything will go well."

"I do not like working in the dark," responded De Vere: "neither will I be made a convenience of. How do I know but that you have got me to become your companion simply that you may have greater facilities in carrying out your own special plans without any intention of serving my interests after all?"

"Hush! speak not too loud!" said Fossano hastily. "Do you know what would be our fate if the conversation which we are having together, should by any possibility be overheard?"

"What would it be?" asked our hero.

Fossano looked hard in his face; and then his lips framed as it were the word rather than his tongue spoke it—"Death!"

"I understand," said De Vere; "we should be

treated as spies. Now I will not run this risk and be left in the dark by you. You and I have formed a compact—I have reposed faith in you: why do you hesitate to show me the same amount of confidence?"

"I am only afraid that you would be too punctilious and scrupulous——"

"Preposterous!" interjected Charles. "My only object is to escape hence without becoming involved in any further trouble; and I care not by what means my purpose is effected."

"But the oath you have taken?" exclaimed the man.

"I presume you likewise have taken an oath," said our hero,—“or else how could you possibly be here?"

"Well, yee—I have taken an oath:" said Fossano spoke hesitatingly.

"And you do not regard that oath," said Charles, looking at him fixedly in the face. "Perhaps you consider that such an oath has no moral obligation, while it assuredly can have no legal one—and that therefore you are justified in breaking it?"

"Why, for what do you take me?" inquired Fossano, now gazing with a certain degree of alarm on De Vere's countenance.

"I take you for what you are:—and then it was in a tone no higher than the slightest whispering of Zephyr, our hero added, "A spy!"

Fossano turned pale; but instantaneously recovering himself, he said with a smile, "Well, of course, you must have guessed it from the very first moment I began speaking to you in confidence."

"Yee—I guessed it," said Charles. "I could not suppose that a man who had been an agent of the celebrated Count Ramorino, would care much about Italian patriotism. But we will not waste time in useless discussion. Listen! I paired with you, suspecting that you were a spy:—you cannot therefore suppose I am so over-scrupulous as you may have at first imagined. Not a whit of it! Then as for the oath which I have taken, perhaps I do not respect it much more than you respect the one which you yourself have taken."

"Ah! if this be the case," said Fossano, his countenance brightening up, "we shall indeed pull well together."

"And in order to do so," said Charles, "I must know your plans. I care nothing for the betrayal of this secret Society—I have no reason to thank any one present—but every motive to be indignant at the coercive treatment I have sustained. Therefore betray them—do what you like with them—but I insist upon knowing how you purpose to proceed."

"It is but fair that you should do so," said Fossano; "and now that I fully comprehend the particular tone of your mind, I can have no hesitation in giving you my complete confidence."

"Proceed," said Charles.

"I shall presently write a note," pursued Fossano, speaking in the lowest possible whisper; "and this note will by some means or another be conveyed to the authorities."

"And this note, I presume," said Charles, "will be penned in cipher?"

Fossano nodded an assent.

"Doubtless," continued our hero, "the plan is

already settled by which you are to convey the note to the authorities?"

"The plan is not settled more than this," answered the spy,—"that there will be some one lurking about the exterior of the premises, ready to receive any communication which I may have to impart. For I knew enough of these secret Societies to be aware that it is even easier to get amongst them sometimes, than to get away from their midst just at the very moment when it would best suit one to retire. Therefore that precaution was taken."

"You mean that some one was stationed in the neighbourhood to await the chapter of accidents?"

"Precisely so," rejoined the spy. "He will be on the alert; for he knows not whether it may be a billet flung from a window—or a note sent by any other hand——"

"Well," ejaculated De Vere, "and how do you calculate upon delivering your billet to this person?"

"The conclave will presently separate stealthily and by degrees—but all in pairs—that by different routes and means they may make the best of their way to Genoa. But you will remain here until the last moment; and I, as your comrade, shall continue with you. We shall depart together at midnight, when, according to the information I have received, a chaise is to be at the entrance of the palace to fetch you."

"Am I to understand therefore," said De Vere, "that you could not now leave this place even if you desired it?"

"No—assuredly not—I am your pair, and must remain with you."

"Ah! now I understand," said our hero, "to what calculations on your part I am indebted for your confidence and your promised assistance. You could not have very well carried on your plot without me; for if you had been paired with another, he would have blown out your brains at the slightest appearance of treachery."

"We are rendering mutual services," said Fossano. "You are helping me in my views—and I shall assist you in the furtherance of your own."

"You have yet to inform me," said our hero, "how my escape is to be effected, and what is to be the result of your billet penned in cipher and forwarded to the authorities?"

"The chaise which conveys you and me," replied Fossano, "will be stopped on the outskirts of the city—and it will be made to appear as if we were to be arrested; but we shall knock down the *gendarmes* and escape. You understand me?"

"Perfectly," rejoined our hero. "But that can only be one of the anticipated results of the billet in cipher. The grand consequence, I presume, will be seen at Leghorn when the expeditionary vessel reaches that port?"

"You have rightly guessed, signor," answered Fossano. "All these madmen will be arrested, and a stop promptly put to their insane projects."

"One question more have I to put," said Charles; "and then I shall be satisfied. How do you purpose to obtain an opportunity of writing the billet which is to be despatched to the authorities?"

"There are writing materials both here and in

the guard-room," rejoined Fossano; "and inasmuch as not the slightest shadow of suspicion rests against me, it will not seem at all strange presently if any one should find me penning a letter. You must understand, Signor De Vere," continued the spy, "that I obtained recommendations of the first class to the Marquis of Ortona, who has long been known as a conspirator——"

"And how did you obtain such letters of recommendation?" inquired Charles.

"From the president of a section in Tuscany," was the response.

"Ah! then, that president himself must have been a spy?" said our hero.

Fossano gave a knowing look—and then added, "Between you and me, signor, these conspiracies never can succeed, because by some means or another the various Governments of Italy always manage to introduce their spies into the midst of the plotters."

"No doubt of it," said Charles: and then with an air of gratitude, he said, "I shall be infinitely indebted to you for emancipating me from this awkward position. What right have I to be mixed up in foreign plots and conspiracies?"

"Particularly in one with the objects of which you have no real sympathy!" interjected Fossano; "for I listened with attention to all the arguments which passed between yourself and the Marquis of Ortona when first you were introduced."

"Yes—and therefore it would be hard indeed to suffer for such a conspiracy," said Charles. "But Ah! by the bye, what kind of cipher do you use in such correspondence as this whereof you have been speaking? I, as something of a diplomatist, have a curiosity in that respect."

Fossano explained his system of cipher-writing, which though exceedingly ingenious, was nevertheless remarkably simple; and thus a very few words were sufficient to make Charles thoroughly comprehend it.

The members of the conclave were now gradually taking their departure—every pair keeping together precisely as Fossano had explained the process to De Vere. The number of those who remained kept on diminishing—time was passing—and we should observe that quantities of refreshments were furnished in the guard-room for those who liked to partake of them. Charles and Fossano proceeded thither, and in a few minutes the Countess di Milazzo made her appearance.

"Signor De Vere," she said, at once advancing to our hero and taking his hand, "I have heard from my sister how generously and nobly you acted on our behalf with the police-agent. The eloquence of gratitude does not consist in many words, but in the few that are fervently spoken; and these wherein I convey my own deep sense of obligation come up from the very depths of my heart."

The Countess looked most exquisitely beautiful as she thus spoke; and Charles thought to himself, "Good heavens! that such a woman should endanger herself by conspiracies and stand a chance of perishing on the scaffold!"

"Are the guests beginning to leave the saloons of her Highness?" inquired Fossano, who, as our hero's double, so to speak—or his pair, in other parlance—was bound to remain standing close by his side while the lady was addressing him.

"Yes," answered the Countess: "by half-past eleven o'clock all will have retired."

The Countess quitted the guard-room: Charles and Fossano were now alone together.

"I shall seize this opportunity," said the spy, "of penning my billet."

"Do so," said Charles. "It were better to write it unobserved and thus run no risk of detection."

Fossano was scarcely a minute in committing a few hieroglyphic lines to paper; and when he had finished, he was about to fold the missive.

"One moment!" said Charles; "let me see what you have written:"—and deliberately taking up the paper, he read its contents, which ran as follow:—

"The attempt is to be made upon Leghorn. The expedition sails from Genoa. Fifty persons were assembled here. Ortona commands. The sisters will go. Let the chaise be stopped and myself and companion liberated."

"You see," said Fossano, "that I am dealing fairly by you. I stipulate for your release as well as for my own."

"I know it," said Charles; "and this consideration shall have its weight with me."

"What do you mean?" asked the spy, with uneasiness depicted in his looks.

"I mean," rejoined De Vere sternly, "that by the exercise of more dissimulation than ever I have before displayed in all my life, I have gleaned your secrets."

"Good God!" murmured Fossano, turning deadly pale; "is it possible that you mean to betray me?"

"No! that is not my purpose," replied our hero: "that is to say, provided you fulfil my command."

"But surely, surely I have not misunderstood you?" said Fossano, still speaking as if under the weight of consternation: "surely you wish to emancipate yourself?"

"Not by the violation of oaths deliberately taken," answered Charles; "nor under circumstances which must lead to the betrayal of many of my fellow-creatures to the scaffold—no, nor to the prejudice of those two sisters so high-minded and so unselfish, so beautiful and so magnanimous! No, vile wretch! nor to put gold into the pocket of such as thou! But quake not!—it is not my purpose to bring about your own destruction. Take your pen, and write another billet to my dictation in this same cipher."

Fossano—terribly crestfallen, and inwardly enraged—found himself completely in De Vere's power; and concealing his emotions as well as he was able, he prepared to write to the young gentleman's dictation. The words which De Vere thus dictated ran as follow:—

"No attempt is to be made for the present: but I am leaving Turin to follow up a clue which I have obtained. You will hear from me in due course, when I shall know more. It is needless to watch the Spartivento palace: indeed, it were much better that there should be no espionage in that quarter."

"What can be the meaning of this?" asked

Fossano, in amazement. "Instead of endeavouring to defeat the conspiracy, you are giving it all the succour in your power!—instead of adopting measures for your own escape, you are compelling yourself to go to Leghorn, where who knows what may befall you?"

"I have already told you that I will not betray these conspirators—and therefore I will not frustrate the conspiracy; because it is impossible to accomplish one thing apart from the other. As for compelling myself to go to Leghorn, it is my business, not your's."

While Charles was thus speaking, Fossano reflected deeply; and all in a moment he sprang up from his seat, crushed the letter in his hand, and tossed it into the fire.

"Villain! do you defy me?" ejaculated De Vere.

"No!—but I accuse you as a spy!" ejaculated Fossano: and springing upon Charles, who had not an instant's leisure to defend himself, he hurled him upon the pavement-floor, at the same time crying out for help.

The door was burst open—three or four of the brethren rushed in—and our hero was made a prisoner.

"Search him at once!" cried Fossano; "and let some one hasten to make a report to the Marquis!"

CHAPTER L.

THE ACCUSATION AND THE DEFENCE.

ALL that we have just related took place so suddenly—indeed with such whirlwind rapidity—that Charles was smitten as it were with complete dismay; and thus there was something in his looks which seemed to corroborate the accusation flung out against him by the treacherous Tuscan. The brethren searched him; and from his waistcoat pocket they took the billet in cipher which Fossano had first written, and which Charles, while dictating the second note, had inadvertently folded up and thus placed about his person.

"Signora, I am innocent!" he exclaimed, at length recovering his self-possession. "I am innocent, I take heaven to witness!—and that man is the spy!"

"You will not get many people to believe that assertion, my friend," said Fossano, with a sneer.

"What is the matter?" inquired the Marquis of Ortona, who at this instant entered the guard-room. "What! they say De Vere is a spy? Impossible!"

"It is true, my lord!" said the Tuscan emphatically.

"It is false!—false as pandemonium itself!" exclaimed our hero indignantly. "Let me be heard!"

"Good heavens, quarrelling! disputing! when there should be naught but the calmest unanimity of action! For shame, signora!"

It was the Countess di Milazzo who thus spoke at the instant she reached the threshold: but she caught not the words that were previously uttered from the lips of our hero and the Marquis.

"What can it all mean?" she demanded, thinking it must be something more than a quarrel

when she beheld De Vere held a captive in the midst of the brethren—the ominous looks of Fossano—the sombre gloom, mingled with uncertainty, that appeared upon the features of the Marquis—and the flushed cheeks of the captive himself.

"Signora," said Fossano, "this young man believes not the opinion which many must have formed of him when he introduced himself amongst us. He is a spy!—and as such I accuse him!"

"A spy?" and the Countess recoiled as if she experienced a sudden shock; then instantaneously recovering herself, she emphatically exclaimed, "No! I will believe almost anything rather than this!"

"A thousand thanks, gracious lady, for that good opinion!" said De Vere; "and rest assured that it will not be falsified!"

"The case is most grave," said the Marquis of Ortona, "and must be immediately investigated. Come to the proper place."

He led the way into the hall of assemblage, and took his seat in the presidential chair. The brethren conducted Charles De Vere thither, and stationed him in front of the nobleman who was now to act as his judge. Some dozen or fourteen other members of the Society, who still remained there, gazed with surprise and consternation upon one another as they hurriedly received the whispered statement that De Vere was accused of being a spy. Father Falconara was not present: he had previously left the conclave, as it was not his intention to accompany the expedition to Leghorn.

"In the first place," said the Marquis of Ortona, "we will hear the accusation; and while it is being made, I charge you, Signor De Vere, to hold your peace. You shall in due course have every opportunity of defending yourself."

"I must begin by informing your lordship," said Fossano, "that I had previously had some acquaintance with Signor De Vere in my capacity of an agent of police at Florence. But your lordship is aware that though I served in that capacity, it was only for the purpose of gleanings such intelligence as might be useful to the secret brotherhood whereof I have long been a member, and whose interests I have most dearly at heart. I believe that the testimonials which I had the honour of this evening presenting to your lordship, speak thus much in my favour?"

"On that point there is no doubt," said the Marquis. "Proceed."

"This young gentleman," continued Fossano, "fancied from the mere fact of my having been a police-agent in Florence, that I must necessarily be a spy; and under that impression he began to sound me in a way which led me to answer him in a particular strain that I might the better extract his own views, objects, and designs. It is unnecessary to enter into full details. Suffice it to say that I led him on until he confessed his determination to betray the conspiracy, if possible. I suffered him to believe that my aims were entirely in accordance with his own; and he penned a billet in cipher, which he purposed to deliver into the hands of some one whom he expected to be lurking near the carriage that was to be in readiness to convey him away from the mansion. The note has been found upon his person."

"Tis here," said one of the brethren.

"X 7 constitutes the key to the cipher, my lord," said Fossano: "and you can now read the document for yourself."

The Marquis studied it for a few moments; and then he read it aloud. It would be impossible to describe the sensation which was thus produced: the brethren gave vent to fierce ejaculations of rage, demanding the immediate death of the supposed culprit. The Marquis looked sombre and dubious: but the Countess, standing forward, said, "Let no harm be done to Signor De Vere until he shall have spoken in his defence."

"Let the accused speak," said the Marquis; "and God grant that for the safety of himself, and the honour of the cause, he may be enabled to convince us that worthy Signor Fossano is labouring under some strange mistake."

"That will I soon do," said De Vere, "if there were ever an instance when truth might prevail against the vilest falsehood! I commence, therefore, by proclaiming mine innocence, and by hurling back the accusation in the teeth of this miscreant. It is he who is the spy! The testimonials which he produced this evening are from one who is himself a spy!"

"It will not serve you, Signor De Vere," said the Marquis of Ortona gravely, "to level accusations against any absent persons who have hitherto borne a high character in the movement."

"I tell your lordship the same thing which this man told me with his own lips," continued De Vere. "The writing of this billet is not mine: it is his! I compelled him to pen another in a very different strain, when he suddenly threw it into the fire, seized upon me, and charged me with being that which he himself is."

"But if you had previously suspected him to be a spy," asked the Marquis of Ortona, "wherefore did you not at once lay hands upon him?"

"Perhaps," suggested the Countess di Milazzo, "Signor De Vere was only waiting until he got in his possession the document which he was compelling Signor Fossano to write. Was it so?"—and she looked at our hero with the earnest air of one who wished that he might be enabled to give a satisfactory answer.

"I cannot say that I should have laid hands upon this man and accused him at all," said De Vere. "Nay, more—I will confess that it was my design to spare his life; but I should have effectually prevented him from doing any mischief."

"Such a confession alone," ejaculated several voices, "is sufficient to ensure the condemnation of this Englishman! He never ought to have been spared in the first instance, and allowed to compromise matters with new-fangled oaths."

"The fact that I would not take the first oath which was presented to me," said De Vere, "is a proof that I was no ill-intentioned person. If I had come amongst you as a spy, I should have done everything to lull suspicion asleep."

"You might not have originally come amongst us as a spy," said one of the brethren,—"and indeed we think that there is sufficient proof that you did not: but that the idea of betraying us subsequently entered into your imagination, is only too possible."

"And let it be borne in mind," said Fossano, "that the prisoner has had opportunities of communicating with persons in the course of this



evening—with a police-agent of Turin, for instance—

"My sister the Princess," interjected the Countess, "heard everything which passed between Signor De Vere and that police-agent; and I am proud and happy to have this opportunity of declaring that every syllable which fell from Signor De Vere's lips was most honourable and creditable to him."

"Perhaps," suggested Fossano, "his natural astuteness made him suspect that there might be an unseen witness to that conversation. Let us proceed to ascertain whether he had an opportunity of speaking to any one else at the same time that he was up-stairs?"

"Perhaps her ladyship," said the Marquis of Ortona, thus alluding to the Countess, "can give some information on this point?"

The Countess looked distressed for a moment,

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and a shade of suspicion likewise came over her features as she glanced at De Vere.

"Yes," she said; "I am bound to admit that my sister, placing the fullest reliance on the honour of this Englishman, left him to converse alone with a lady of his own nation—a certain Madame Level—who was introduced by one of the royal aides-de-camp, Captain St. Didier."

Here Fossano gave an involuntary start; and Charles bending upon him a significant look, said, "Perhaps my accuser will, upon mature reflection, withdraw the charge, so infamously false, which he has brought against me?"

"That were to confess himself guilty!" exclaimed one of the brethren; "and he should assuredly die!"

"Withdraw the charge?" ejaculated Fossano, instantaneously recovering his presence of mind. "I consider it already proven."

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"Yes—proven! proven!" ejaculated several voices vehemently.

The Marquis of Ortona looked deeply sombre; and even the Countess herself had not another syllable to urge in favour of De Vere.

"Speak, unhappy young man!" at length said the Marquis, "have you aught to plead wherefore the extreme sentence should not be passed upon you?"

De Vere was revolving in his mind whether he should at once proclaim how he had heard from Floribel's lips that St. Didier had employed a spy to penetrate into the Spertivento Palace: but he feared that it would be an exceeding breach of confidence. He however said to himself, "I know that Floribel would rather I should make use of her name, even though it were to compromise her, than that I should perish thus miserably;—and at all events I have this alternative as a last resource. In the meanwhile I will try another ploy."

"For heaven's sake, signor," hastily whispered the Countess, in accents which displayed the deepest concern on his behalf, "if you have aught more to urge, delay not!"

"Methinks I can propose a ploy," said Charles, "by which mine innocence will be fully proven, and the guilt brought home to the right party."

"Speak," said the Marquis. "If the plan be reasonable it shall be executed."

"In the first place," pursued De Vere, "let Signor Fossano write in this same cipher a note which I shall dictate."

"Readily!" said the Tuscan, who lost not his presence of mind, inasmuch as he began to feel that he stood in much need of it.

He took paper and pen; and taking good care to write in a feigned hand, he thus followed De Vere's dictation:—

"I have been altogether on the wrong scent: there is no mischief brewing here; and it is needless to watch the Spertivento Palace. I cannot come to you myself at this moment, for I am following up another clue which I have accidentally obtained. You may trust the bearer with any note; and my surname is the pass-word."

"Now," said De Vere, addressing himself to the Marquis of Ortona, "may I beseech your lordship to send some trusty and intelligent person to that same Captain St. Didier who was just now mentioned; and your messenger cannot fail to discover by this billet what is the name of the spy who has introduced himself within these walls."

While thus speaking, Charles steadily watched Fossano's countenance; and he saw that the man grew pale: he observed likewise that he trembled despite all his endeavours to conceal what he felt. The Marquis of Ortona's features indicated a sensation of internal relief as he said, "Your proposition seems fair enough, young signor; and so far as I may fathom its purpose, it appears as if it were calculated to bring matters to a speedy and unmistakable issue."

"Yes," said the Countess di Milezzo, whose beautiful countenance had likewise partially cleared up, though there was still a lingering shade of uneasiness upon it; "it is a test that cannot fail in one way or the other."

"But stop!" ejaculated Fossano; "the mere fact of suspecting me is an indignity! it amounts to an insult!"

"Who suspects you?" demanded the Marquis of Ortona, almost sternly.

"By putting the matter to such a test as this," answered Fossano, "a suspicion is implied. What is the value of all my credentials—all my services—if they are to be thus ignored just because a stranger whose word ought not to be taken, and whose actions are replete with causes for mistrust, chooses to impugn my character?"

"You have accused him," said the Marquis of Ortona; "and he had a right to make his defence. Though the stringency of our laws and the urgent nature of our interests—embarked as we are in such an enterprise—render us stern and implacable in carrying out a sentence that is pronounced, yet we are men and we are Christians—we love justice—and we will not pronounce that extreme sentence until all the requisite proofs are before our eyes. Where is Stefano Voitura?"

A young man, about four-and-twenty years of age, with a pale thoughtful countenance, but with the fire of intelligence in his black eyes, stepped forward on thus being summoned. He had been leaning against the wall, with his arms folded across his breast, listening to the proceedings that we have been describing: but he had not opened his lips to join in any of the clamorous exclamations raised by the tongues of others who were present. He was well though plainly dressed: that is to say, he was attired like a gentleman, but without the least display or pretension. He was distantly related to the Marquis of Ortona: he followed no profession—but subsisted on some small independent means of his own; while heart and soul he was devoted to the cause in which he had embarked. Such was the young gentleman who now stepped forward; said Charles De Vere, who had previously noticed him with a feeling of friendly interest, felt pleased that such a messenger should be selected for the important object which involved matters of life and death.

"Stefano," said the Marquis, "you have heard everything which has just passed—you behold the accuser and accused face to face—and an experiment is about to be tried which must inevitably have an important result. Take this billet to Captain St. Didier, and return with the least possible delay."

Stefano took the note which had been written in cipher to Charles De Vere's dictation; and with a bow to the Marquis, he quitted that subterranean hall of assemblage.

"Now," said Ortona, "I am compelled by present circumstances to regard both the accuser and the accused as prisoners. Let them be secured separately and well guarded."

The Marquis waved his hand; and while Charles De Vere was borne back to the guard-room and there left alone, Fossano was conducted to some other place amidst that mass of subterranean vaults; and a sentinel was placed at the door of each prison-chamber.

There was a light in the guard-room; and our hero sat down upon a bench and gave way to his reflections. He now observed for the first time that there was an inner door, which appeared to be of immense strength; for it was crossed with iron

here and studded with nails. But not for many moments did his attention dwell upon that door; for there were far more serious topics to engage his thoughts. His life now seemed to depend upon a series of chapters of accidents: he had become involved in a maze of difficulties of such a nature that the slightest incident might serve to confirm his destruction—while on the other hand, if he escaped from his present embarrassment, he could not tell how soon other chasms might open at his feet. He thought of Agnes; and Oh! he wept—yes, the tears ran down his cheeks as he reflected that he might possibly never behold her again: for he knew that if by any mischance the experiment which was now being tried should go wrong, death must inevitably be his portion!

He was in the midst of such reflections as these, when the massive door to which we are now alluded, opened noiselessly; and the Princess of Sparteinto appeared, carrying a light in her hand. She raised her finger to her lip to enjoin silence: and Charles stifled as it were the ejaculation of surprise which was just on the point of bursting forth from his tongue. The Princess still wore the same elegant evening toilette in which our hero had previously seen her; but instead of the calm dignity which habitually sat upon her noble countenance, there was now an expression of feverish anxiety.

She beckoned Charles to follow her: and as he obeyed, he found that she was leading him along an arched passage towards another door which stood open. This latter door led into a room filled with swords, fire arms, and other weapons. Here the Princess stopped short; and she said, "I have brought you hither, signor, because the sentinel placed outside the door of the guard-room might catch the sound of voices if we had tarried to converse there. Answer me, signor!—answer me as if you were speaking to one sent from heaven with power to question you! Are you guilty? or are you innocent?"

"Innocent!" responded Charles fervidly: "as I have a soul to be saved!"

The dark eyes of the Princess shied upon him a look of indescribable satisfaction; and he fancied for an instant that she made a gesture as if to grasp him by the hand in a congratulatory acknowledgment of the assurance. But her demeanour grew calm all in a moment; and she said, "Beware, signor, how you deceive me: for it is with your very life that you are trifling! Listen to me. I am confident that you did not come hither as an spy—but that it was by a mistake on Igoatio's part that you were brought within these walls. On the other hand I can conceive it quite possible that when accident thus revealed to you this tremendous conspiracy with all its ramifications—involving you likewise in it, irresistibly and against your will—I can easily fancy, I say, that you were led by a variety of motives to resolve upon denouncing or betraying it. If this therefore be the case, for heaven's sake confess it to me! I cannot forget," continued the Princess, while a crimson glow overspread her countenance, "how you spoke to the police-agent when he so infamously assailed the characters of my sister and myself. Ah! I know the world well. There is scarcely a young man to whom such observations had been addressed, that would not, with the com-

comical libertinage of the present day, have looked or smiled significantly in implied boastfulness of the favours unto which allusion was being made. But you acted differently—and a woman never forgets such conduct as that which you have displayed! Tell me therefore—tell me, Signor De Vere—do you apprehend anything as the result of young Stefano's mission?—for if so, I will save you!"

"Gracious Princess," replied our hero, in tones of grateful fervour, "I know at what a tremendous sacrifice you make this overture——"

"Yes: for it is nothing short of a violation of my oath whereof I should be guilty! But—but," continued the Princess, and her eyes were bent compassionately upon our hero, "I would sooner prove thus deeply culpable than let your young life be taken under existing circumstances!"

"As there is a God above us," rejoined Charles, "I am innocent—and Fossano is the spy!"

A light of unmistakable joy flamed up in the eyes of the Princess; and now no longer checking the impulse that urged her, she caught our hero's hand, pressing it warmly in her own. But there was naught more than the most friendly interest in her conduct and demeanour,—naught savouring of a more tender sentiment, much less of an immodest overture. She released his hand—she made him a sign to return to the guard-room—and she whispered, "I believe that you are innocent, and therefore all must go well!"

The door then closed upon Charles De Vere, who was once more alone in that prison chamber.

Ten minutes or a quarter of an hour elapsed, during which De Vere was reflecting upon the incident that we have just related, when he beheld the massive door again opening. He started with surprise; and his amazement was scarcely diminished when he beheld the Countess di Milazzo upon the threshold. She carried a lamp in one hand; and the forefinger of the other was raised to her lip to enjoin silence. There was an expression of feverish restlessness, mingling with blushing diffidence, upon her charming face; and her large bright eyes were cast down with a bashful modesty the instant they encountered the inquiring regards of our hero.

"Signor De Vere," she said, in a low whispering, hesitating voice, "you may think this proceeding strange on my part: but—but—you have the feelings of a true gentleman—and you will judge me only in the most chivalrous and magnanimous point of view!"

Having thus spoken, she raised her looks with all the ingenuous candour of a pure conscience and with the best intentions; and she said, still in a whisper, but no longer with tremulous accents, "Follow me: we may be overheard in this place."

She led him into the same room where the interview had so recently taken place between himself and her sister; and she at once said, with a look and tone of confidence, "You will understand, Signor De Vere, that though every sentiment of my soul is concentrated in the cause wherein I am embarked, yet I possess a memory which cannot be unmindful of kindness received. You have shown yourself most honourable towards my sister and myself—and I cannot find it in my

heart to leave you exposed to the slightest risk. You must escape!"

"Escape! And why so, lady?"

"Because you may be disappointed in the result of this mission which has been entrusted to Stefano. In a word——"

"In a word, your ladyship," interjected Charles, "believes that I am guilty of being a spy?"

"I consider that it is possible you may have harboured a certain intent," pursued the Countess: "you may have been driven to it by desperation—goaded by feelings of madness—inspired by a fierce anger against those who compelled you to remain enlisted under their banner——"

"And you think, lady," said Charles, "that I was capable of devising means to betray yourself and your sister to the scaffold? No, by heaven! I would not do so! I would die first!"

The beautiful eyes of the Countess surveyed our hero with mingled admiration and gratitude; and for a few moments their expression acquired a softness which was even of a tender character. Then her regards were modestly bent down, as she faltered forth, "You see, Signor De Vere, you have not altogether outdone me in the generosity of your conduct. I came to save you—I *will* save you now if you think that you incur the slightest peril! Yes—though I become a perjured woman—yet sooner *that* than to see you perish! Understand me well, signor! I am speaking as a friend speaks to a friend, or as a sister to a brother!—for if you on your side have been generous and magnanimous, I on my own also must make some sacrifice. In a word, signor, will you follow me, and I will show you the avenue of escape."

"A thousand, thousand thanks, signora!" exclaimed Charles, with looks and accents of the most grateful fervour: "but I need not compromise you. I am certain that my innocence must presently be made apparent."

"You are convinced?" said the Countess, now fixing her eyes earnestly upon him, "you are sure there can be no error—no mistake? Remember that when you again stand before the Marquis of Ortone, it will be too late for me to urge a syllable on your behalf!"

"I must run the risk," said Charles,—"*a risk*, which, alas! innocence is too often compelled to incur on the part of all earthly tribunals. But I swear to your ladyship that I am innocent, and that Fossano is the spy!"

"Then God will not desert you," replied the Countess solemnly. "And now, signor, I must entreat that you return into the guard-room."

Charles at once obeyed,—the Countess following him as far as the threshold, on reaching which she said timidly and bashfully, and again with downcast eyes, "I trust, signor, that you will not think the worse of me for the step which I have taken, and that never to mortal ear will you breathe the fact that the Countess di Milazzo visited you stealthily in a dungeon. But no!" she immediately added: "to proffer such requests were as much as to imply that I mistrust your honourable character, whereas I have every faith in it!"

She gave him her hand, but timidly and diffidently; and it was only for a single instant that she suffered it to linger in his own—though at the same time her eyes had a melting expression and

the colour was coming and going in quick transitions upon her beautiful countenance. She closed the door: it swung noiselessly upon its hinges—and Charles was again alone.

The reader may wonder why he did not avail himself of the offer made by either of the sisters to escape from the Spartivento palace; and yet a minute's reflection upon the character of our hero would sufficiently explain his forbearing conduct in this respect. He had taken an oath which he would not violate. But even if he were less punctilious on the point, and considered that he was not bound by vows extorted from him under circumstances of coercion, he would nevertheless have been incapable of permitting those ladies to violate the oaths which they themselves had taken to the Secret Society. And then too, he would not for the world have it be believed by the Marquis and his confederates that he was after all a base spy. No! there was something so spirited, lofty, and chivalrous in our hero's disposition, that he would sooner encounter any difficulties and dangers, or subject himself to any inconvenience, than risk his character for straightforward integrity and high-minded generosity. These were the motives which prevented him from accepting the offer of escape from either of the sisters.

While reflecting upon the separate visits which had been paid him, he comprehended that the Princess and the Countess had acted unknown to one another; and he fancied that though they were both impelled by the same generous and grateful sentiment, yet they had not dared to reveal it to each other. While Charles was thus giving way to his meditations, he perceived that the fire was getting very low; and as the night was cold, especially in that vaulted subterranean, he rose from his seat for the purpose of raking the embers together and putting on fresh logs—for there was an ample supply of wood in a recess. While he was mending the fire, his attention was caught by a piece of paper which was crumpled up, and which had escaped burning, though it was singed into yellowness. A thought struck him! he took up the paper—he opened it—and he found to his joy that it was the letter which he had dictated in that guard-room to Fossano, and which the villain had thrown into the fire!

"Now," thought Charles with exultant feelings, "there will be but little difficulty for me to prove mine innocence and bring home the guilt to that villain. Aye! and this I will most assuredly do, whatever may be the consequences to him!"

He secured the singed letter about his person; and in a short time the door opened and three or four of the brethren appeared to conduct him back to the audience hall, where the investigation was to be continued.

CHAPTER LL.

VOITURA.

THE Princess of Spartivento and the Countess of Milazzo met in one of the splendid apartments of the palace, after the visit which they had respectively paid to our hero.

"Dearest sister," said the Princess, "how think you that it will fare with the young Englishman?"

"It was the very question, my dear Bianca," said the Countess, "that I was about to put to you!"

"But you, Lucia," proceeded the Princess, "heard the entire proceedings."

"And I reported everything to you, Bianca. You therefore are enabled to judge as well as myself."

There was a pause: the sisters looked at each other, and it seemed as if some little degree of constraint had sprung up between them. Again they glanced at one another, each anxious to ascertain whether there were really this altered feeling on the part of the other;—and then they bent down their eyes again.

"Surely she cannot possibly suspect what I have done?" thought the Princess.

"Surely she cannot suspect my proceeding?" thought the Countess, at the same moment that a slight blush crossed her countenance, while the Princess regained her wonted air of calm self-possession.

"Well, my dear Lucia," said her Highness, "if you wish me to give my opinion, it is entirely in favour of the Englishman."

The Countess hesitated for a moment; and then she said, "And mine also."

"It would indeed be a very great pity," said the Princess, "if a young gentleman who has shown such magnanimous feelings in certain respects, could in others prove less generous—less high-minded——"

"No doubt!" said the Countess. "But there is really something in his looks which carries to the heart the conviction of his integrity——"

"And when he speaks there is something so frank and ingenuous in his speech——"

"Something so truthful and convincing in the easy flow of his language—which is well chosen—never halting for a word——"

"And his voice of such perfect masculine harmony!" said the Princess.

"And his manners," added the Countess, "altogether so fascinating and elegant—yet with such a well bred ease——"

She stopped short: her looks encountered those of the Princess, and both sisters seemed troubled, and they could not for more than an instant meet each other's regards; but their eyes were bent down. There was a pause—a sense of constraint, an embarrassment almost amounting to a coldness; and these two sisters felt as if there were indeed a secret between them.

"Lucia!" suddenly ejaculated the Princess.

"Bianca!" cried the Countess, startled by the adjuration.

"We have not forgotten," continued the Princess, "the vows which we pledged to one another over the dead bodies of our husbands!—those vows which we have incessantly reiterated by the side of the waxen effigies representing the beloved perished ones!"

"No, sister," answered the Countess, "we have not forgotten those vows which bind us to the sacred cause of Italian freedom!"

"And which," continued the Princess, "leave no room in our hearts for the entertainment of

any other sentiment, passion, thought, or feeling!"

"Yes, dearest sister," rejoined the Countess; "we are faithful to those vows!"

Yet the Princess of Spartivento felt as if she herself were speaking with less energy and with a less genuine sincerity of feeling than was her wont when on former occasions alluding to those vows which she and her sister had taken: while, on the other hand, the Countess said to herself, "Am I speaking truthfully? is there no difference between my words and my thoughts?"

Then the two sisters again looked at each other—and the Countess flung herself into the arms of the Princess: but it occurred to them both that the embrace was less fervid than usual, and there was a feeling as if some kind of a barrier had risen up betwixt them. They therefore ventured not upon any further test of each other's feelings: but they hastened to their chambers to make preparations for departure on the revolutionary expedition.

We must now return to Stefano Voitura, whom we left at the moment when he quitted the subterranean hall of assembly, with the billet in his possession. Muffling his cloak around him, he presently issued forth from the Spartivento palace by means of the principal entrance, where the lights were burning in front and where a flood of lustre was poured forth from the portals. Voitura descended the marble steps slowly, with an easy lounging air as if he were one of the guests who had so recently thronged in the gilded saloon, and as if he were therefore very far from being bent on a business-pursuit. Most of the guests had already taken their departure: but some few were still lingering in the hall and on the marble steps, waiting till their carriages should be announced. Voitura was just entering upon the gravel-road leading towards the outer-gate of the grounds, when a man who seemed to be a valet in plain clothes, bustled officiously up to him, saying, "Are you looking, signor, for any particular equipage?"

"I am not looking for any equipage," replied Stefano.

"For any particular person?" said the man.

"Ab, that is as it may be, and is a different thing altogether," rejoined Voitura.

"Can I assist you, signor?" and the man eyed him scrutinizingly.

"I think not. But this is for your trouble:"—and tossing him a piece of silver, Voitura turned to pursue his way.

"St. Didier!" ejaculated the man, but in a low tone and with evident caution, as he stooped to pick up the coin.

Voitura—who from the first moment had suspected something from the manner of the individual—was now struck with that name which appeared to be thrown out like a watchword to be caught up by the initiated, while to the uninitiated it would pass as a mere ejaculatory expression. He accordingly turned again towards the man; and looking him hard in the face, repeated the word—"St. Didier!"

"Follow me," said the man: and he at once diverged from the avenue, making his way towards a clump of trees, into the midst of which he plunged.

Stefano Voitura kept close upon his heels; and when in the deep shade of the trees, he repeated the name—"St. Didier."

"Tis well," said the man. "You come from——"

"One who has well used his eyes and his ears," responded Voitura, "but who is unable to leave the place at this juncture."

"What tidings have you? or is there a billet?"

"A billet. I must deliver it into the hands of him for whom it is intended."

"Tis well," again said the man. "The Captain left the Spartivento palace about half-an-hour ago. He was escorting a beautiful lady——"

"Where shall I find him?" inquired Voitura.

"He is sure to be at his own apartments in the royal palace," answered the man; "because he is most anxiously awaiting the result of the present proceedings."

"Then I will hasten thither."

Voitura sped away; and in about a quarter of an hour he reached the royal palace. On inquiry, he learnt that Captain St. Didier had that very moment returned to his apartments, and had left word that whosoever might call upon him, no matter at what hour of the night, should be admitted. In a few instants therefore Stefano found himself in the presence of the handsome aide-de-camp, who having thrown off his uniform-coat, and put on a dressing-gown, was reclining upon the sofa, smoking a cigar. But on Voitura's entrance into the apartment, St. Didier rose from his seat, bowed, and indicated a chair; then resuming his place on the sofa, he waited till his visitor should begin to explain his business.

"You are expecting some one?" said Stefano.

"Perhaps," said the aide-de-camp, guardedly.

"I have just parted from a certain person who is waiting about the entrance of the Spartivento palace."

"Well," said St. Didier; "and he told you to come to me?"

"Yee—through the medium of a pass-word. Here," proceeded Voitura, producing the billet, "is a confidential communication which I have for you."

The aide-de-camp took the letter without saying a word—opened it—and read its contents: having done which he looked up, remarking, "You will give me a pass-word as a proof of your good faith."

Voitura looked him steadily in the face, and said—"Fossano."

"Yee—Fossano," answered the aide-de-camp.

"If you have any message or letter to convey to Fossano," said Voitura, "I shall find the means of delivering it."

St. Didier reflected that his spy must have particular motives for sending him a billet written in cipher, instead of a verbal message, by the present emissary; and he therefore decided upon taking the cue which seemed to be thus given him. He accordingly took up his pen; and in the same cipher as that which Fossano himself used, he wrote the ensuing lines:—

"Your's is received; and as the means of communication are now open, you must let me know

as soon as possible what you are doing and what you mean by another clue. If you require funds, let me know. The next time let the watch-word be the name of the individual who first recommended you to my notice."

"Will you have the kindness to deliver this?" said Captain St. Didier, as he handed the billet to Voitura.

"I will find the means of doing so," answered this individual; and without another word he took his departure.

So soon as he was gone, Captain St. Didier penned the following letter to the Prefect of Police:—

"Your Excellency may rest assured there is nothing wrong at the Spartivento palace; and you need not have the premises watched for another moment. Indeed, it would be better to withdraw your spies at once, for fear lest a suspicion might be excited on the part of those ladies who have doubtless been unjustly regarded as the accomplices or agents in a conspiracy.

"ST. DIDIER."

Meanwhile Stefano Voitura was retracing his steps to the Spartivento palace; and immediately on his return, he made his way by the private staircase to the room where the hidden mechanism afforded the means of entrance into the subterranean.

It was now therefore that the brethren proceeded to the guard-room to conduct Charles De Vere back to the audience-hall. On entering the place, he found the Marquis of Ortona again in the presidential seat. Fossano was brought in by three or four members of the Society who had been specially charged to take care of him; and there was a small group of other brethren standing near the Marquis of Ortona's chair. On first sweeping his glances around, our hero did not perceive either the Princess of Spartivento or the Countess of Milezzo; but on again looking towards the group, his regards suddenly became riveted on the two foremost. He started for an instant with amazement: those two were the Princess and the Countess, dressed in male apparel!

The former, being of tall stature and commanding figure, looked admirably in the masculine raiment which she thus wore; and being about six-and-twenty years of age, she had the air of a very handsome young man of one-and-twenty. Her sister, the Countess, being shorter and of a slighter figure, looked like a mere stripling:—indeed a stranger would have taken her for a beautiful youth of about seventeen. Both the ladies wore hats; and their hair was so arranged as not to reveal their sex. When they perceived that Charles De Vere noticed and recognised them, the Princess drew herself up with a somewhat haughty dignity, although she at the same time flung a meaning look of congratulation upon our hero; but the Countess blushed a vivid scarlet—and she at once carried her kerchief to her face to hide her confusion. For an instant however Charles caught the half bashful, half exultant glance which she flung upon him; and thus the looks of the two sisters at once convinced him that he was safe.

Stefano Voitura was leaning against the wall

near the presidential chair, with his arms crossed, and his pale, pensive, handsome countenance being altogether inscrutable. Full of anxious suspense—aye, almost agonizing was the glance which Fossano flung upon Voitura: but thence he could glean naught that was at all indicative of the way in which matters were about to go.

"I need not explain the purpose for which we are assembled," said the Marquis of Ortona, thus with these few words opening the renewed proceedings. "Stefano, be kind enough to step forward. Have you acquitted yourself of the task entrusted to you?"

"I have," was the response.

Charles perceived that Fossano gave a sudden start; and he comprehended how the wretched man must be inevitably shaken by the epism of a strong torturing terror.

"There was a person waiting outside the palace-entrance," continued Voitura, "who answered to the watchword of St. Didier. This I succeeded in discovering. I then proceeded to Captain St. Didier; and I found that he was prepared to receive a message or a billet, accompanied by another pass-word."

"And that pass-word?" said the Marquis.

All eyes were turned upon Voitura, as he said in a deep solemn tone, "The password which I gave to Captain St. Didier, and which he acknowledged, was Fossano!"

There was a murmur of sensation on the part of the brethren, while the wretched Fossano himself sank down upon his knees with a groan: and then joining his hands, he exclaimed, "Mercy! mercy!"

At the same time Voitura handed to the Marquis the billet in cipher which St. Didier had confided to him.

"There is no mercy in this case!" said the Marquis of Ortona, sternly, when he had perused the billet. "We have now every possible evidence of your villainy!—Signor De Vere, it is with unfeigned joy I congratulate you on this complete demonstration of your innocence; and for my own sake as well as on behalf of all the others present, I tender my apologies for the mistrust which we entertained concerning you!"

"And therefore, as you owe me somewhat," said De Vere, "I shall consider myself amply repaid for the injurious suspicions I sustained and the peril I incurred, if you will grant this wretched man his life. Confine him in a dungeon until your expedition be accomplished—or take him with you by force, as you purposed to take me—do what you will with him, so long as you spare him! It is something which I have a right to demand."

"You plead for him in vain, signor," said the Marquis of Ortona: "his doom is sealed. We should be violating the most terrible oaths if we allowed this wretch to escape us. Therefore, in the name of the secret laws which we obey, I hereby decree sentence of death against Ludovico Fossano—and execution shall be forthwith done!"

"Mercy! mercy!" shrieked the miserable wretch: but when he was assured that his appeal was made in vain and that no mercy would be shown him, he either sank into a torpor or else into a dogged sullenness, no one could exactly tell which.

"Let the usual lots be prepared," said the Marquis of Ortona.

Charles suddenly comprehended with a shudder that those who were present were about to draw lots to determine who should become the executioner of the doomed one. Stefano Voitura hastened to tear up a quantity of slips of paper; and he sat down at the table near the presidential seat, to write out the names.

"I will dictate them," said the Marquis: then he proceeded to proclaim several names, commencing the list with his own:—"Ortona—Spartivento—Mileazzo—Voitura—Reguso—Columella—De Vere——"

"No, by heaven! no!" ejaculated our hero, horrified and indignant. "And you, ladies," he continued, turning towards the Princess and the Countess, "is it possible that you can permit your names to figure in this assassin-list?"

"Silence, signor!" interposed the Marquis of Ortona. "You have claims upon our forbearance and consideration, but not to this extent! You are amongst us—and you shall take your turn with the rest."

"I will die sooner than draw the accursed lot!" exclaimed De Vere, with unabating horror and indignation. "Fie upon you all! It makes me feel as if the dreadful scenes which I have read in books of voyages were being realized, and as if impelled by famine to the verge of cannibalism, we were about to draw lots to determine who should die to furnish food for the rest! I will have naught to do with the odious process."

"One word, signor!" said the Marquis of Ortona. "We are here linked together by immutable laws; and you cannot escape their duties or their penalties. Indeed, you ought to be ashamed of your own pusillanimity when you reflect that you shrink from those responsibilities which two high-minded and delicately nurtured ladies accept unhesitatingly——"

"I will not believe," cried Charles, "that the Princess of Spartivento——"

"You are wrong, signor," said this lady, with the air of a heroine who felt as if she were truly and actually embarked in the noblest and grandest cause. "I accept the liability."

"But your sister," said Charles,—"the Countess? It is impossible that she——"

"Signor," said this lady—but instead of stepping forward, she shrank back; "speak not of me, I entreat, as one who fears the contingencies and eventualities of the sacred cause!"

Charles was shocked and horrified: but suddenly recollecting how enthusiasm may amount to fanaticism, and how fanaticism may warp the well-principled mind, embolden the timid one, and harden the delicate, he held back the reproaches and remonstrances which he was about to pour forth from his lips.

"And now, signor," resumed the Marquis of Ortona, in a haughty and indignant manner, "I would ask who are you that you obtrude your exquisite fastidiousness where ladies far more highly bred than yourself, cheerfully and magnanimously accept the responsibilities of the cause in which they are embarked?"

"Spare your invectives, my lord," said Charles: "but no earthly power shall induce me to draw in these cold-blooded assassin lots!"

"Then some one will draw for you," said the Marquis coolly.

"I deny the proxy!" cried our hero: "I repudiate the substitute!"

"Enough, enough!" interrupted the Marquis impatiently. "If you will not draw for yourself some one must draw for you: and if the lot fall upon you, and you refuse to obey the decision, you yourself incur the penalty of death."

"Then here all human patience fails!" exclaimed Charles; "and I denounce you all, without exception, as——"

But he stopped short as he caught sight of the Princess and the Countess, and remembered how they had sought him in the guard-room to offer him the means of escape, even though they themselves became perjured by the fact.

"You do well, signor, to cease this style of language," said the Marquis of Ortona, who was however far from comprehending the cause of that sudden cessation: "or else I should be compelled to adopt coercive means towards you. And now let the drawing of the lots proceed."

While this altercation was taking place, Stefano Voitura had calmly and tranquilly continued to write out the names of those present; while the brother named Ragusa proceeded with equal deliberation to load a large double-barrelled pistol with bullets. Meanwhile the wretched man Ludovico Fossano, who was the main cause of all these proceedings, was lying upon the pavement of the subterranean hall, in a state of either torpor or sullenness.

The slips of paper containing the names were folded up: they were then thrown into a hat, which was duly shaken about for several minutes; and then Voitura presented it to the Marquis of Ortona, who averted his countenance in such a way that he could not look into the hat as he stretched out his right hand to draw a paper.

"According to the laws of our Society," said the Marquis, "I am about to draw forth two papers. The first name so drawn is for the purpose of being in reserve: the second individual on whom the lot falls must perform the work of justice. But if this second individual should refuse so to do, the duty devolves upon the first one drawn,—and in this case the person who by the defalcation of a brother is forced into the office of executioner against the culprit, is bound likewise to inflict the capital penalty on the defaulting brother himself. These are our laws; and by virtue thereof I proceed to draw the names."

The Marquis of Ortona, still with his countenance completely averted over his left shoulder, thrust his right hand and drew forth one of the folded papers. He headed it to Columella, who opened it, proclaiming aloud the name of *Spartivento*.

Charles De Vere started with a strong shuddering as he flung his looks upon the Princess: but that lady seemed determined to maintain a heroism that was in accordance with the masculine garb which she wore—and she preserved an almost perfect self-possession: but her sister turned very pale and staggered visibly for a moment.

"The second name!" cried the Marquis of Ortona.

Again he thrust his hand into the hat—he drew forth a paper, which he handed to Signor Co-

lumella, who proclaimed aloud the name of *De Vere*.

Our hero was about to repudiate with horror and indignation the result which so vitally concerned himself: but all in a moment a full sense of the terrible consequences which would redound upon the Princess swept into his mind, making him reel beneath the weight of an awful consternation and striking him dumb.

CHAPTER LII.

THE EXECUTION.

YES—fearful was the predicament in which Charles De Vere suddenly found himself placed. If he refused to take the double-barrelled pistol and therewith blow out the brains of the wretched culprit, Fossano, the duty of playing the part of executioner would of necessity devolve upon the Princess di Spartivento. But this was not all! The Princess would be compelled to wreak the vengeance of the Secret Society on De Vere also! In brief terms, she must first put the culprit to death, and then perform the same part towards the defaulting brother, who by shirking his own duty, thus entailed the horrible twofold task on the individual whose name was first drawn!

All eyes were turned upon De Vere; for every one comprehended in a moment how he was placed in the most embarrassing and even awful predicament. What would his decision be? Great was the suspense that prevailed. As for the Princess, she was calmly dignified—paler perhaps than usual; while her sister the Countess could but ill conceal the terrible agitation which was torturing her soul. The silence too was awful; and as if to aggravate the deep noiseless hideous aspect of the scene, the wretched culprit had risen up to his feet and was gazing with ghastliest vacancy upon those around him.

"Signor De Vere," said the Marquis of Ortona, at length breaking the appalling stillness; "there stands the criminal—here is the weapon—and you are the person appointed by lot to inflict the punishment decreed by the laws of our Society!"

Our hero started as if from a horrible reverie; and he said, "I acknowledge not such laws; they level honest men down to the grade of the lowest assassins!"

"Remember your oath!" said the Marquis sternly.

"Ah, yes!" cried Charles; "appeal to my oath if you will! To what did I swear? That I would in all things obey my superiors in the contemplated enterprise, so long as they ordered me to undertake nothing repugnant to my own feelings!"

The Marquis bit his lip for a moment; and then as an idea struck him, he said, "Beware how you persist in refusing to obey our laws: for if you continue to be thus headstrong and disobedient—thus self-willed and perverse—you will revive all our suspicions against you."

"How do we know," exclaimed Columella, "but that he might have been as much a spy as Fossano himself?"

"The word spy in your throat!" vociferated our



hero; and the next instant Columella was smitten down upon the pavement.

"Ah!" thundered Raguso, snatching up the loaded pistol: "are we to have violence here?"

"Peace, peace! I command you!" cried Ortoos. "Good heavens! under what auspices is our expedition to commence!"

"My lord," said Columella, rising up slowly and painfully from the floor, "I demand justice against this young Englishman."

"Permit me to observe," said the Prince of Spartivento, "that Signor Columella was the aggressor. He called Signor De Vere a spy; whereas the charge has been fully disproved."

"With due deference to your Highness," said Columella, whose countenance was white with rage, "I do not consider that the charge has been disproved. It has only been shown that Fossano is a spy: it has not been demonstrated that De Vere is *not*! They might have been acting sepa-

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rately and severally; then, by a coincidence, De Vere might have addressed himself in confidence to Fossano; and Fossano, thinking to save himself from suspicion, may have turned round upon the Englishman and denounced him."

"Cease this ridiculous prating!" cried Charles. "Here is the proof that I am no spy! This is the very billet which I dictated to Fossano in the guard-room, and which he tossed into the fire. It was not consumed—and just now I recovered it. Look! it is in the same cipher, and in its meaning is not very different from the second billet which I dictated to Fossano, and which Signor Voitura bore to Captain St. Didier. My lord, read it aloud."

The Marquis took the singed paper, and read the contents as follow:—

"No attempt is to be made for the present; but I am leaving Turin to follow up a clue which
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I have obtained. You will hear from me in due course, when I shall know more. It is needless to watch the Spartivento palace: indeed, it were much better that there should be no *espionage* in that quarter."

"In good sooth," said the Marquis of Ortona, after he had read the billet, "we are bound in all honour and justice to acquit this young Englishman."

"I will stake my life upon his innocence!" said Voitura, emphatically.

De Vere thanked him with a glance: but Stefano's demeanour was still cold and inscrutable, as he said, "At the same time it is impossible to absolve De Vere from the responsibilities and liabilities which are entailed upon him by his connexion with our Society."

"Once for all, young man," said Ortona, "will you do your duty?"—and he pointed first to the pistol and then to the culprit.

"There was a moment, when I was a prisoner in the guard-room," said De Vere,—"a moment in which I thought that even with my own hand I could take the life of the man who so basely and falsely accused me! But now I shrink with loathing and abhorrence from the bare idea of an act which seems to me nothing less than one of foulest assassination."

"Then let De Vere himself die!" exclaimed several voices, amongst which Columella's was the loudest.

"Hold!" said the Princess of Spartivento, stepping forward; and her mien was unnaturally cold and determined. "There is strife amongst us!—we stand upon the verge of disruption and ruin!—and the cause of Italy will be sacrificed to private feuds and personal animosities! This must not be!—and it is reserved for a woman to recall you to a sense of your duty. Lead the criminal aside."

Thus speaking, with a species of cold, glacial heroism which produced an overpowering effect, as if some supernatural feeling had seized upon the listeners, the Princess took up the pistol. Her sister made one step forward as if about to clutch the weapon from her grasp: but she restrained herself, and then stood motionless.

"My God! what would you do?" cried our hero, horrified almost to madness by this new phase of the hideous scene—a phase more frightful and appalling than all the rest!

"What would I do?" said the Princess: and then she added coldly and sternly, "My duty."

"Your duty," exclaimed Charles: "your duty to whom? Will you forget your duty towards God in the false notions which are here inculcated? If it were the cause of real patriotism it would be different! But it is not for the sake of the oppressed millions——"

"Enough, signor—enough!" interrupted the Marquis of Ortona. "We are not going to discuss that question anew."

"Uphand me! let me go!" yelled forth Fossano, now galvanised into new life, as several of the brethren seized upon him and were dragging him towards the farther extremity of the hall.

"Wretch, be silent!" cried Columella, who was one of those who had held upon him. "Your doom is sealed!"

"Signora," exclaimed Charles, turning like one distracted towards the Princess, "I beseech your Highness to reflect well on what you are doing! Oh, signora!"—and now he flew to the Countess; "intercede—remonstrate—entreat—command——"

"Seize upon this madman!" thundered the Marquis of Ortona, now losing all patience.

Half-a-dozen men obeyed the mandate as if they were so many tigers springing upon the same victim; and notwithstanding the desperate resistance which our hero made, he was quickly overpowered. He gasped for breath, and his eyes stared wildly.

A horrible scene now took place. Fossano, still shrieking and struggling, yelling and entreating, was dragged into a corner of the hall.

"Spse me!" he cried. "Mercy! mercy! as you yourselves would hope for mercy at the great day of judgment! Help! help! Murder! Let me go! Oh, I have a wife and children!—little children that will be asking for their father! Let me go! Ah, the wretches! I will kick! I will bite! Murder! Death! Let me go!"

And while the miserable wretch was thus giving vent to the awful agony of his feelings—and while Charles De Vere was powerless in the arms of the men who held him—the Princess of Spartivento was advancing with a pistol in her hand towards the shrieking, yelling, imploring culprit. Then, just as she reached him—just as her fine form habited in masculine apparel cast its shadow upon the wall close by where the miserable being was battling and screaming, shrieking and entreating in the midst of his custodians—Charles De Vere, recovering his breath, cried out, "No, no! for God's sake do it not!"

The words were still vibrating through the subterranean, when there was a loud report, the sound of which could not however penetrate beyond the massive walls which beat it back. There was not even so much as a groan—for the muzzle of the weapon had been placed close to the wretch's head: and there he now lay a corpse!

A dizziness came over the eyes of Charles De Vere—a faintness seized upon him—and his head fell back. He endeavoured to rally himself—but he could not; and consciousness abandoned him. He had gone through so much during the last few hours—his feelings had been wound up to so fearful a degree of tension—that, high-spirited and full of fortitude though he were, he could not meet with impunity that succession of shocks, the last of which was the most fearful of all. And thus he sank into a state of insensibility.

When he came to himself he was inside a post-chaise that was proceeding at a rapid rate. It was a beautiful moonlight night; and he found that he had three companions. At first he felt as if he were just awaking from a horrible dream: but as his recollections rapidly came back, and all the details of that horrible closing scene rose up like ghostly phantoms in his brain, he shuddered from head to foot, and he would have given half the remainder of his life to know that it was indeed all a mere dream! It was some time before he spoke; and in the meanwhile he ascertained who were these three companions. Next to him was the Marquis of Ortona; in front of him was Stefano Voitura; and the other was a young

man whom he did not know by name. Voitura was the first to perceive that he had recovered and that his eyes were open; and he said in a voice which now struck our hero as being kind and tinged with compassionate sympathy, "How do you feel now, signor?"

"According to the laws of your Society," said Charles, with a bitter irony in his accents, "was it not the duty of the person who drew the first lot, to kill me as a defaulting brother, after that same person had acted as executioner towards the culprit? Why, then, was I spared? Sooner would I have died——"

"Speak not in such terms as these!" said the Marquis of Ortona; "but rather thank your stars that the first lot was drawn by a high-minded lady who knew how to perform her duty towards the Society to which she belongs by putting to death a criminal, but who experienced an illimitable compassion for you! For believe me," continued the Marquis, "if the first lot had been drawn by any one of the male members of our fraternity—Columella or Raguso for instance—you would not now be alive to give utterance to a comment upon the subject!"

De Vere felt that whatever his sentiments might be in reference to the deed which the Princess had perpetrated, he at least ought not to reproach her. It was on account of *his* refusal to abide by the laws of the Society that the execution thereof had devolved upon that lady. He was more or less the cause of her taking that course! Yet he felt humiliated to think that he was so placed as to be disqualified from commenting in full freedom upon what he still regarded as a fearful atrocity; and he could have wept in bitterness because of the necessity of suppressing his indignation.

There was a long silence, during which he reviewed his position. He was evidently a prisoner amongst the conspirators; and the proofs which he had received of their desperate character were only too terrible. And not merely a prisoner was he—but likewise included in the ranks of the conspirators. What was his chance of escape? Only that of landing with them at Leghorna and then trusting to circumstances. But if he assumed a hostile front, looked aullen or indignant, or gave vent to bitter observations,—might he not fare even still worse at their hands? might they not so far mistrust him as to leave him out of the expedition altogether, though at the same time taking effectual measures to prevent him from betraying it, by thrusting him into some dungeon at Genoa or by keeping him a captive on board the vessel which was to transport them from that city to Leghorna? Or still more horrible, might they not in their desperation put him out of the way altogether by means of murder's work?—for when the crisis approached, such bloodthirsty ruffians as Columella and Raguso would scarcely be inclined to stand upon much punctilio in order to ensure their own safety.

All these reflections passed through the brain of Charles De Vere:—hot, feverish, and almost maddening reflections were they at first; but they gradually became cooler—and he mentally argued the whole subject more soberly and more deliberately. He therefore came to the conclusion that it was absolutely necessary for him to adopt a conciliatory demeanour—to dissemble the feelings that

were now chafing his soul—and, in short, to throw the brethren as much off their guard as possible and lull their mistrust of him asleep, so that he might be placed in a position to realize his own special views and aims. As for the dread scene which he had witnessed in the subterranean of the Spartivento palace, he made up his mind to retain the seal of silence faithfully upon his lips when he should obtain his liberty: for he was mindful of the oath which bound him to secrecy in respect to the present proceedings, so long as such secrecy might be needful to the interest of the cause itself or the safety of the members embarked in it.

"Alas!" thought De Vere within his own mind, "secrecy on this one point will prove indispensable for the safety of the Princess as long as she lives!—for the law would not regard her as the executive of a legitimate vengeance, but would look upon her as a cold-blooded murderess!"—and he shuddered as he made this reflection.

Having completely settled his plans, and determined upon the line of conduct which he was to pursue, our hero presently broke silence,—and said in a mild friendly voice, "Signor Voitura, you were just now kind enough to inquire how I felt; and I fear that I answered you churlishly—for I was under the influence of those embittered impressions which naturally attended the collection of my thoughts on my first awakening from a state of unconsciousness."

"Offer no apology, signor," said Stefano; "but believe me when I declare that I am rejoiced to hear you now speaking in a healthier strain."

"Yes—I feel much better," observed De Vere; "and I beg that whatsoever rudeness or discourtesy there has been in my conduct, may be ascribed to feelings that were tensely strung—to the novelty of my situation—to my ignorance of the usages of these Secret Societies——"

"Enough, my young friend! enough!" exclaimed the Marquis of Ortona, now breaking in upon the discourse. "I am delighted to be enabled once again to call you my friend. No doubt the ordeal through which you have passed was a trying and a painful one——"

"It might be said," interjected our hero, "that for several hours I was kept balancing between life and death,—first menaced with destruction because I could not take a particular oath—next accused of being a spy—then threatened with capital penalties for refusing to fulfil the duties which the drawing of the lots attributed to me——"

"Well, well," said the Marquis, "we will not review unpleasant things, nor travel again over disagreeable ground. It is sufficient that you are in a better frame of mind; and indeed I never knew a high and magnanimous spirit such as yours, to be otherwise than marvellously elastic!"

Our hero by dint of the conciliatory manner which he now adopted, succeeded in replacing himself on good terms with his comrades; and the discourse was continued for some little while longer, but on general and indifferent topics,—until one by one the occupants of the chaise fell off to sleep.

Charles De Vere slumbered for some hours: and when he awoke he felt quite refreshed. It was now morning; and the Marquis of Ortona intimated to our hero that in a few minutes they

would be in sight of Genoa. And so it was: for in less than a quarter of an hour the tall buildings of that superb and ancient city began to develop themselves to the view; and not long afterwards the postchaise was rolling through the streets of the principal seaport of the Piedmontese kingdom. At length the equipage drove into the court-yard of a spacious and handsome mansion; and several domestics came forward to receive the travellers.

Charles now found that his portmanteau had been brought with the chaise; for this was the vehicle which, according to the instructions he had given to the Turin police-agent, had been sent to take him up at the gate of the Spertivento palace. Now he was in Genoa!—and he alighted from the equipage in the court-yard of this mansion where the domestics were so assiduous in their attentions. To whom did the habitation belong? Charles was not kept many moments in suspense, for Signor Raguso, advancing from the marble steps of a doorway, exclaimed, "Welcome to Genoa!"—then in a hasty whisper to our hero, he added, "You are my guest, and you shall receive every hospitality. There can be no hostile feeling between us?"

"None," replied Charles: and he grasped the hand that was proffered him.

He now perceived that Signor Columella was standing close behind Raguso; and the colour mounted to our hero's cheek as he recollected how he had been insulted and accused by that individual.

"If you can forgive and forget, Signor De Vere," said Columella, now stepping forward, "I can do the same."

He extended his hand, which Charles immediately took; for he remembered the conciliatory policy which he had determined to adopt—and he moreover recollected that he had amply chastised Columella at the time in the subterranean hall of the Spertivento palace.

Raguso and Columella now conducted the guests upstairs; and they first left the Marquis of Ortona and Charles together in an elegantly-appointed dressing-room: they then escorted Voitura and the other individual, whose name was Spezzi, to a neighbouring chamber. A thought now flashed to the mind of our hero: he suddenly remembered something which in the whirl of other thoughts he had forgotten. Raguso and Columella were pairs!—Voitura and Spezzi were pairs!—Ortona and he himself were therefore pairs!

At that very moment the Marquis said to him with a smile, "You see, my dear young friend, you and I are each other's shadows. You in the first instance had paired off with the spy Fossano; and after his death I took you as my own pair, seeing and considering that I was previously unpaired; for it is not absolutely necessary that I, as the leader of the expedition, should be bound by the rule."

"How was it," inquired Charles, "that Signor Voitura was permitted to go alone, without his double, to call upon Captain St. Didier?"

"It is obviously necessary," replied the Marquis, "that I, as the leader, should be enabled to despatch at any moment whomever I may think fit upon any secret or important expedition."

"And the sisters?" inquired Charles, remem-

bering their separate visits to the guard-room; "are they considered as a pair?"

"Now that they are together embarking in the expedition—prepared to fight under our banner—yes, *fight*," repeated the Marquis impressively,—"they are subject to the same laws as all the rest."

By the time the Marquis and Charles had performed their ablutions, and thus thoroughly refreshed themselves after their night's travel, Raguso and Columella returned to conduct them to an apartment, where they found Voitura and Spezzi and six others of the conspirators. A luxurious repast was served up; and ample justice was rendered thereto. The conversation flowed entirely upon general topics; and it was carried on in a free, easy, off-hand style, as if the gentlemen had nothing serious upon their minds; for it was absolutely necessary to maintain the utmost caution in the presence of the domestics who waited at table.

When the breakfast was over, the pairs quitted the apartment at different intervals, so that at length the Marquis of Ortona and De Vere were left alone together.

"Might I venture to ask," said Charles, "when we are to embark upon the expedition?"

"Hush!" said the Marquis; "nothing must be uttered within these walls that may stand the chance of being overheard! But since you have put the question, I will reply to it by informing you that we expect to embark this evening."

The door of the apartment now opened; and a domestic entering, addressed himself to the Marquis, saying, "May it please your lordship, a certain Signor Palmas has this moment arrived."

"Ah, Palmas!" ejaculated the Marquis with an air of satisfaction. "This is excellent! I bade him meet me here, if possible! Let him come up at once."

The domestic withdrew; and the Marquis of Ortona, after reflecting for a few instants, said to De Vere, "I have already informed you that as the leader of the expedition I have certain powers and privileges. You will understand me, therefore, when I tell you that you need not act as my shadow while I am engaged with Palmas."

The door of an adjoining room stood partially open; and Charles, taking the hint, strolled into that apartment, closing the door behind him. Let it be remembered that he had no intention of escape, even if the opportunity presented itself, inasmuch as he considered himself bound by his solemn oath to accompany the expedition to Leghorn. Therefore, now that he was alone, he did not give himself the trouble to see where the windows of the room looked, or study the position of the apartment: but throwing himself upon a seat, he took up a volume of Italian poems which lay upon the table. He had just begun to read a few lines, when he heard the door of the adjoining room open and some one enter that apartment, with the words, "I have the honour to salute your lordship."

"My dear Palmas," cried the Marquis, "you have indeed faithfully fulfilled my instructions! You have been expeditious!"

"The frequent plying of the steam-vessels, my lord, between Leghorn and Naples, and also between Leghorn and Genoa," replied Palmas, "has

enabled me to accomplish the business thus speedily. I received your lordship's letter which you sent me from Florence——"

"Well, well," interjected the Marquis somewhat impatiently: "and you——"

At this juncture Charles De Vere rose from his seat, and advanced towards the window of the apartment in which he found himself. He did not wish to play the part of eavesdropper in respect to the discourse which was taking place between the Marquis and Signor Palmas. The partition between the two rooms was a very slight one; and hence the facility with which whatsoever was said in one could be overheard in the other. By moving to the window, our hero lost a part of the discourse betwixt Ortona and his newly-arrived friend; and then for some little time also these two personages conversed in a much lower tone than that in which they first began speaking. The window looked upon the court-yard; and Charles, observing nothing there to interest him, was about to have recourse again to the volume of poems, when he was startled by an exclamation in the adjoining room.

"This is truly wonderful!" cried the Marquis of Ortona: "it is almost incredible!"

Then Palmas said something, which the ears of Charles did not catch.

"For the present therefore," proceeded the Marquis, "we will say nothing to him on the subject. But never was anything more marvellous! By heaven, it is a perfect romance!"

Again was there some remark from the lips of Palmas, inaudible to our hero.

"You yourself can go thither," resumed the Marquis of Ortona: "you can give the information——Indeed you can prepare the people of the place——" here the nobleman's voice sank so that Charles caught not the next portion of the sentence: but he heard him conclude by saying, "And I hope, if all things go well, to accompany him thither myself."

"Then I shall expect your lordship; and——" but here the voice of Palmas became inaudible to Charles.

The Marquis said something in reply; and then again burst forth into the exclamation of "It is marvellous! Who could possibly have thought it? Did it not astonish you?"

"Naturally, my lord," responded Palmas. "To tell the truth, I never was more amazed in all my life—and I could scarcely believe my own eyes."

The Marquis then said something, of which all that Charles could catch were the words, "intentions honourably carried out"——"instructions obeyed to the very letter."

There was again an interval of discourse carried on in a very low tone betwixt the Marquis and his friend; and then the latter took his leave. Charles De Vere wondered to what subject the particulars of that interview could allude, and what matter could have transpired to elicit such vehement ejaculations of surprise and astonishment from the lips of the Marquis. He could not conceal from himself that his curiosity had become excited after he had risen from the chair and approached the window; and that contrary to his original design, he had actually become a listener. He was angry with himself for the circumstance: but still he again felt more or less curious in re-

ference to a subject which could have excited so much astonishment on the part of both Ortona and Palmas.

"My visitor has gone," said the Marquis, now opening the door of communication between the two rooms and beckoning Charles to rejoin him.

He said not a syllable in reference to the purport of that individual's visit; and he evidently did not suspect that Charles had overheard a syllable of the discourse that had passed.

Presently Raguso and Columella returned, bringing numerous letters, which the Marquis of Ortona read with the utmost attention, destroying some as soon as they were perused, and making memoranda on the backs of the others. The two Italians whom we have just named, together with Voitura and Spezzi, acted as the aides-de-camp and messengers of the Marquis, keeping up the requisite communications between head-quarters and the other houses in Genoa amongst which the remainder of the conspirators were distributed. Thus the hours passed away; and we may add that the time hung heavily enough upon the hands of our hero—for he could not settle his mind to reading; and as the Marquis did not leave the mansion during the day, Charles had no opportunity of obtaining a view of the principal streets or buildings of Genoa. Dinner was served in the afternoon at about four o'clock; and at six the company began to disperse in pairs, ostensibly for the purpose of lounging out to visit the cafés or billiard-tables, but in reality to seek the port and embark on board the vessel which the conspirators had bought for that purpose.

"Now, my young friend," said the Marquis of Ortona, when he and our hero were left alone together, "we will light our cigars and refresh ourselves with a walk after Raguso's excellent wine."

This was said in the presence of a domestic; and the Marquis went forth from the house with our hero. Arm-in-arm they proceeded through the streets: they reached the quay of the noble harbour of Genoa, while the dusk was closing rapidly in: they entered a boat which was waiting at a particular spot; and the watermen, who had evidently received their instructions, rowed towards a vessel which lay at a little distance.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE EXPEDITION.

OUR hero was now on board the ship which had been fitted for the revolutionary expedition. Signor Raguso was a wealthy merchant; the vessel had been bought in his name—the arms and ammunition had been sent off from his warehouse, under the semblance of sales of goods—and thus nothing had transpired to excite the suspicion of the local authorities. The conspirators, about sixty in number, had embarked from different points, a few at a time; and, in a word, every precaution had been taken to throw a veil over the proceedings. The Marquis and Charles were amongst the last for whom the ship had waited; and very soon after they set foot upon the deck

the anchor was weighed and the vessel stood away from the queenly city of the Mediterranean.

The night set in very dark: but there was a strong breeze blowing favourably, and the ship was a fast sailer. The distance from Genoa to Leghorn is ninety miles; and the pilot prophesied that if the wind continued thus propitious, the voyage might be accomplished in about twelve hours. Now that all the conspirators were on ship-board—hemmed in within those wooden walls—debarred from the possibility of communicating with any persons beyond those barriers—the rigidity of the Society's discipline began to relax itself, and the members no longer kept together in couples. Indeed, the Marquis of Ortona himself gave an intimation to the effect that the rule might for the present be suspended; and he bade Charles walk about the vessel, remain on deck or go below, just as he thought fit. Our hero first descended into the main cabin, where he found a number of the conspirators engaged with cards and dice: he returned to the deck, and slowly made the circuit thereof—for he naturally had a curiosity to ascertain whether the Princess and the Countess were on board. He had not as yet seen them; and he had not chosen to put the question either to the Marquis of Ortona or any other of the conspirators with whom he happened to be acquainted.

We have already said that it was very dark: there were several forms stretched here and there upon convenient parts of the deck, enjoying a slumber: others were leaning over the bulwarks, smoking their cigars—or watching to catch a glimpse of the white crest of some wave flashing through the darkness—or else keeping their eyes fixed upon the lights of Genoa which seemed to be receding farther and farther into the distance—and perhaps there were some hearts that were yearning towards homes which never might be revisited—towards wives and children whose smiles and kisses might never again be experienced! Charles, as he made the circuit of the deck, endeavoured—but of course without obtrusiveness—to obtain a glimpse of the countenances of these persons whom he thus passed: but in some instances he only saw them indistinctly—in others not at all. At length he ceased his walk: he likewise leant over the bulwarks; and gradually forgetting Princess and Countess, ship and conspiracy, he sank into a reverie the whole interest of which was concentrated in the image of his beloved Agnes.

How long this reverie lasted he knew not; but he was gradually recalled from it on becoming aware that there was another form close by his side; and the countenance of this person was so completely bent over the bulwark that he could not catch even the faintest glimpse of it. Nevertheless there was a growing suspicion in his mind as to who this person might be: but he was resolved to say nothing until first spoken to. He therefore pretended not to perceive that there was anybody thus close to him; and it was not till after a long silence that a voice stole soft and low upon his ear, saying, "Signor, we are now bent upon this expedition which may have such important results for Italy!"

It was the Countess di Milazzo who thus spoke; and he had suspected that it was she. There was something tremulous, hesitating, and diffident in

her accents,—something which seemed to deprecate any evil opinion which De Vere might have formed in consequence of the final scene at the Spartivento palace. She was in her male apparel, just as when our hero had last seen her in the subterranean at Turin; and as she slowly raised her countenance while she spoke, the moon appearing from behind a cloud, shed its beams upon her features and revealed the melting bashfulness of their expression.

"Yes," said De Vere, "we are entering on an expedition the results of which may be of such consequence to ourselves!"

"You, signor," said the Countess, "may possibly think that the undertaking has commenced under evil auspices——"

"Oh, I am not superstitious, signora!" interjected Charles.

"My sister and I have felt for you very much," resumed the Countess, speaking still more hesitatingly and diffidently than at first: "we regret that you should have been led against your will into the enterprise——and still more profoundly do we deplore that there should have been so many adverse, menacing, and—end—shocking circumstances——"

"Signora," interrupted Charles, "it were better not to refer to the past! Heaven forbid that I should encourage you to proceed in a strain of regrets which may sadden or weaken your spirit at a time when you need all your energies! But is it possible that you mean to fight—actually to fight?"

"Aye, truly!" replied the Countess: and now her charming countenance suddenly glowed with enthusiasm as the moonbeams fell upon it.

There was something at the tip of our hero's tongue—something which the natural obliquity of his disposition prompted him to speak—and yet which, on the other hand, a certain punctilious delicacy in reference to his beloved Agnes made him hesitate to express. But all in a moment recollecting how the Countess had come to save him in the guard-room, and how zealous she had been in espousing his cause when he was accused as a spy, he hesitated no longer; but in a fervid voice he said, "Rest assured that there shall be at least one arm to shield you in the coming strife!"

The Countess started: she caught De Vere's hand, and pressed it warmly; then in a low but fervid tone, she said, "I thank you, my friend!"—and she glided away from him.

Almost at the same instant the moon disappeared behind a cloud; and her retreating form was lost to his view in the obscurity which prevailed towards the other extremity of the ship. He turned to pace the deck slowly and to meditate upon the singular character of these two sisters, when he beheld a form sitting motionless apart from all the rest. Again did an instinctive idea come to his assistance for the recognition of the individual; and suddenly seized with an irresistible loathing, he abruptly turned back. He then continued to pace to and fro, at a distance from the spot where that form was seated, until at the expiration of several minutes he advanced to the fore-part of the ship: but there he was struck by beholding the form again seated!—and for a moment a cold sensation crept over him—a species of preternatural awe, amounting almost

to a terror. He again retreated; and in a few minutes he descended into the main cabin. There the gaming with cards and dice was still in progress; and the atmosphere was hot, oppressive, and noxious with tobacco-smoke. He returned to the deck; he leant over the bulwark—the next instant somebody was by his side—and the moonbeams reappearing revealed the countenance of the Princess of Spartivento.

"You have shunned me," she said, in a cold voice—and yet Charles fancied that it trembled: "you have shunned me," she repeated, "and if I consulted my own dignity I should not seek an interview with you. But it is hard to suffer in the estimation of those whose—whose"—and here her voice quivered unmistakably—"whose friendship one would be inclined to covet."

Charles knew not what to say. He could not deny that he had shunned her; but of course he would not confess it.

"Because I performed a duty," continued the Princess, in a low earnest voice, "you have conceived an abhorrence for me! Ah, but even in the performance of that duty might I not have had some hidden ulterior motive? and without this motive should I not have shrunk from the accomplishment of such a deed? I scarcely know why I thus choose to justify myself in your estimation; but let it suffice that I feel the necessity of doing so. Listen! The first lot fell upon me: the second upon you. You shrank from the task which it entailed. I might also have shrunk; and as a woman an excuse would have been found for me. But what would have happened to you? Death would have been your portion! It needed but a volunteer to take my place; and if I had surrendered it, your doom would have been sealed! Was not Columella panting for revenge?—would he not have gladly played the part of executioner in reference to Fossano, that he might have afterwards performed the same part towards you? Well then, if I had flinched, you would have perished! Yet think you if it had not been to save your life I could have taken that of Fossano? No—by heaven, no! It was to save you that I thus sacrificed myself!"

"My God! is this true?" murmured Charles, seized with the deepest compassion towards the lady who was thus addressing him.

"Can you doubt it?" she asked: "does not the tale speak for itself? And now, therefore, will you continue to loathe and hate me?"

"No, no—not hate you!" ejaculated Charles: "I did not hate you! I had not forgotten that you came to me in the guard-room to save me—"

"Hush!" interrupted the Princess. "My sister was talking to you just now. You did not mention the visit to which you have just referred?"

"No," replied Charles. "I considered it to be a sacred secret even from your sister!"

"And it is so. But now tell me—tell me, Signor De Vere," continued the Princess, "do you still regard me with loathing and abhorrence? Or if you look upon me as a murderess,"—and she shuddered visibly as she spoke the word—"will it not to some extent mitigate the strength of your horror and aversion to know that I became a murderess for your sake?"

"I owe you my life," answered Charles; "and that is saying everything!"

"It is sufficient," rejoined the Princess: and taking his hand, she retained it for nearly a minute in her own, at the same time bending upon him a look so earnest and peculiar that he could scarcely comprehend it: then slowly suffering him to disengage his hand, she turned and hurried to another part of the deck.

Our hero did not wish to fall in with the sisters again; and wrapping himself in a cloak, he lay down in a convenient spot, where after a while he fell asleep. He was awakened by a hand being laid upon his shoulder, and a voice saying in a friendly tone, "It is time, my young friend, to rise and arm!"

De Vere started up: Ortona was by his side. It was daylight; but the position of the sun in the East showed him that it was yet early. All was now bustle on board the ship, above and below; and the deck was strown with arms and weapons, offensive and defensive. There were muskets and rifles—pistols and blunderbusses—swords and sabres—side-arms and cross-belts: there were vast quantities of gunpowder and all requisite ammunition. Immense was the excitement which prevailed; and Charles could not help thinking to himself that if this were a patriotism of the true sterling character—democratic and republican, instead of monarchical and aristocratic—it might indeed go far towards accomplishing a grand revolution in the affairs of oppressed and trampled Italy. All the conspirators were now armed, each according to his own particular fancy and the skill which he possessed in the use of particular weapons. Where were the sisters? Charles looked around. The Princess was at the moment approaching him with a belt and the Countess with a sword. They gave him the morning's greetings with cheerfulness and cordiality; and as he suffered them to arm him, he perceived that they maintained the most complete propriety of demeanour, neither of them even so much as venturing to look in his face until they had again retreated to a distance of a few paces. They were armed with swords: they now each grasped a rifle; and they bade him take one likewise. This he did in order to avoid suspicion; but in his own mind he had not the slightest intention of taking a human life otherwise than in self-defence.

Leghorn was soon in sight; and the conspirators sent up a tremendous shout as if the sea-port of Tuscany were already in their possession! But indeed they considered themselves almost as good as virtual masters of the place; for their information had been positive to the effect that the inhabitants were ripe for revolt and would receive them with open arms; so that they felt convinced they would only have to show themselves upon the quay—perhaps overpower the first military station—and then raise the cry of the Solidarity of Italy in order to bring the whole population out to welcome them.

Indeed it was a speech to this effect which the Marquis of Ortona addressed to the conspirators as they were all assembled upon the deck, and when they had sent up that loud enthusiastic shout as they descried the buildings of Leghorn in the distance. The breeze still continued favourable—the vessel pursued its rapid way—and in

another hour the salient features of the Tuscan seaport might be easily descried. Nearer and nearer did the vessel bear its armed freight; and as our hero glanced around him, he beheld a joyous enthusiasm depicted on all the countenances which met his eyes.

"My prophecy will come true," said the Princess, approaching him for a moment and hastily flinging at him these emphatically whispered words, "You are burning to play a noble part, and you will be our heart and soul!"

Charles could not repress a shudder as that woman spoke to him: he blamed himself for it—he thought that he judged her harshly and cruelly—but still he could not help it! It was a relief to him when she glided away to another part of the deck; and he sincerely hoped that he had succeeded in veiling from her the strong repugnance and aversion with which she still inspired him.

A few minutes after he met the Countess of Milezzo as he was proceeding to speak to the Marquis of Ortona, who had just beckoned to him; and he could not help saying, "I think your ladyship would do well to reflect, seriously and for the last time, whether you will venture ashore until you at least ascertain that there is some chance of success."

The beautiful eyes of the Countess bent upon our hero a look of reproach for a moment—and then their expression seemed to melt into the softness of gratitude, as she said, "What, signor! you would have me keep aloof during the storm, but rush in when the sunshine appears? Ah! and yet I know that it is from the best of motives that you give me this counsel! I have not forgotten, signor, your promise of last night—that you would keep a protecting eye over myself and—and—my sister!"

Charles was about to correct her by declaring that he had given no such promise in reference to her sister, when he suddenly perceived how rude, foolish, and strange such a remark would appear. He therefore hastened to exclaim, "Rest assured, signora, that wherever I own obligations I am not unmindful of them! No, no! I will fulfil them!"

The Countess blushed slightly—she hesitated for a moment—she became plunged in a still deeper confusion; and then she said murmuringly and tremulously, "You have not told my sister that—that—I visited you stealthily in the guard-room?"

And Charles answered as he had previously replied to the Princess:—"No; I deemed it to be a secret that must be kept sacred even from your sister!"

The beautiful eyes of the Countess flung upon him a look which showed how grateful she was for the relief which was just given to her mind; and they again separated. Charles hastened to join the Marquis of Ortona, who said to him, "You will keep near me; for the moment is approaching when the strict discipline of the Society is to be renewed!"

Our hero bowed; and as he glanced along the deck, he perceived that the conspirators were arranging themselves in pairs, according to the way in which they had been coupled in the subterranean hall in Turin. The vessel put in as close as was convenient to the harbour of Leghorn: the boats were quickly lowered; and the prepara-

tions for the landing were speedily commenced. The firearms were placed in the boats; but in the enthusiasm which filled their souls, some of the conspirators drew their swords and began to brandish them fiercely as if already engaging with an enemy.

"Now," thought Charles to himself, "is the time for me to inspire the belief that I am altogether with them!"—and he accordingly flourished his own brand as he descended the ship's side.

The sisters were already in the boat which he was entering: he caught their looks. The Princess was surveying him with an unmistakable air of proud admiration, as she might have looked upon a husband or a brother—while the Countess was regarding him with a softer and more subdued expression, though not less glowing with enthusiasm.

It was ten o'clock in the morning—in the broad daylight—with the sun shining, that the three or four boats carrying the conspirators, put off from the ship. The gleaming of their weapons could be observed from the shore: but this was in reality a matter of no consequence—because even if the arms had been concealed, the disembarkation of so large a number of men from one ship and all at the same time, would have naturally excited the suspicion of the authorities. The boats pulled hastily towards the Mole, where a number of soldiers were being drawn up, and in the neighbourhood of which numbers of people were collecting in all convenient places. The idea of the conspirators was that the populace were thus thronging in order to welcome and succour them; and they exchanged amongst themselves expressions replete with enthusiastic hope.

"If it be so," mentally ejaculated Charles, "the work may be short and the enterprise successful: but if the contrary be the case, it is certain failure!"

He was now compelled to look closely at two alternatives which presented themselves like phantoms before him—but by no means for the first time since he had found himself so seriously involved in this enterprise. The spectres to which we allude were *death* or *captivity*; and our hero felt that his fate balanced most uncomfortably between these evil geni. For, to tell the truth, he had no faith in the sudden explosion of the popular enthusiasm in favour of the expedition, unless indeed the veritable democratic cry should be raised loudly enough.

But we must not waste time in description; for we now come to events as startling and rapid in their succession as the volleys of musketry which presently burst forth from the harbour and from the boats. As the conspirators drew nigh, the Colonel commanding the troops demanded who they were.

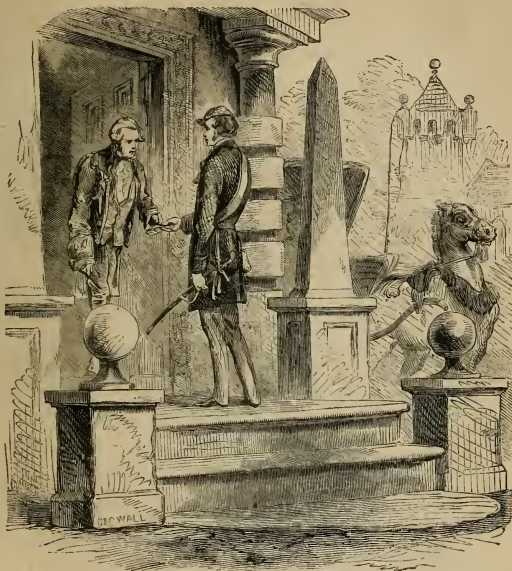
"We will tell you when we land," responded the Marquis of Ortona.

"Then ye are traitors!" cried the Colonel; "and ye must keep off, or I will fire upon you!"

"Soldiers!" vociferated the Marquis, standing up in the boat and addressing the military drawn up on the Mole, "we come in the cause of Italian freedom!"

"Present! Fire!" thundered the Colonel: and his mandate was at once obeyed.

"By heaven, they are with us!" ejaculated



Ortona; for it was evident that the soldiers had almost to a man purposely fired over the boats instead of at them, inasmuch as there was a shower of bullets splashing in the water several yards astern.

"Villains!" cried the Colonel, who, as the smoke cleared away, saw at a glance that there was not a soul hurt in either of the boats; "ye shall be decimated if ye do not do your duty!"

"Long live the Republic!" shouted a voice from the midst of the ranks.

"For heaven's sake, my lord, avail yourself of the cry!" hastily whispered De Vere.

"No!" thundered the headstrong and obstinate Ortona; "our cry is the Solidarity of Italy!"

There was a visible sensation of disappointment and disgust on the part of the soldiers. The Colonel saw it—he comprehended it—and he cried out scornfully, "Oh, ho! they would give

you a King of their own choosing! Fire, boys! fire!"

Another volley poured down from the Mole; this time it was directed towards the boats—two of the conspirators were killed and three or four wounded. The next instant the fire was returned: a sharp and deadly volley was sent up from the boats—the rifles of the conspirators told fatally—and at least a dozen soldiers lay stretched at the feet of their comrades. Another volley—and then another did the conspirators pour upon their opponents; and under cover of this murderous fire they effected a landing in the most gallant and admirable manner. Charles was amongst them; he was close to the Marquis of Ortona. He looked for the sisters—he saw them at a little distance, with their swords and their rifles—he flung down his own rifle (which, by the bye, he had only loaded with blank cartridge)—

and drawing his weapon, he hastened to join the Princess and the Countess.

"Keep with me, young man!" cried the Marquis of Ortona.

"We have landed at Leghorn," ejaculated Charles; "and I am my own master! I will protect the signores."

His concluding words were drowned in the din of musketry; for the conflict was now renewed at close quarters.

"This way!" cried Charles to the Princess and the Countess; and taking advantage of their ignorance of military matters, he led them aside from the point-blank range of the Tuscan soldiery.

The next moment the two hostile parties joined in deadly strife: the conspirators rushed upon the soldiers with the fury of tigers—while the soldiers themselves were now inspired with an equal ardour, for they were bitterly irritated by beholding so many of their comrades falling dead at their feet.

"What are the populace doing?" inquired the Countess of Milazzo with feverish anxiety.

"The people stand aloof!" exclaimed Charles.

"Sister," cried the Princess, "our place is *there*!" and extending her arm towards the thickest of the fight, she was on the very point of plunging into it, when our hero caught her by the wrist.

"Stop!" he said. "Let me put the people to the test!"—then springing upon a capstan, he waved his sword, shouting, "Freedom for Italy! Live the Republic!"

For a moment there was a visible cessation amongst the people who were drawing near to the scene of strife: but some one starting up from amidst them, cried, "Be not deceived! Ortona commands yonder! and we know that he is a Royalist!"

"We will not be deceived!" ejaculated numerous voices.

All this was the work of a few moments; and Charles De Vere sprang down from the capstan—for several bullets had already whistled about his ears. A glance showed him that the Princess and the Countess were now involved within the scope of the conflict; and those two ladies were gallantly defending themselves with their swords.

"Traitor!" thundered a voice, addressing our hero: "your hour is come!"

It was Columella who spoke; and he made a furious thrust at Charles with his bayonet.

"Villain!" cried our hero, seizing the ghastly gleaming weapon and thrusting it aside, but only just in time to save himself: "would you assassinate one of your own party?"

"We disown you!" vociferated Columella: "you cried for the Republic!"

At the same time by a desperate effort he tore away his musket from De Vere's grasp; and goaded almost to madness by the recollection of the blow he had received from Charles, and by the vindictive spite which from that moment he had cherished, he made another tremendous thrust at our hero's person.

"Ah! if it be so," ejaculated Charles, "take this!"—and striking up the point of the bayonet with his arm, he the next instant passed his sword completely through the wretched Italian's body.

But at the same moment Charles was surrounded by antagonists: the Austrian soldiers were pressing upon him. It was only by a display of more than Roman valour that our young hero saved himself. He hurled one assailant to the ground—he turned to meet another—and just as the butt-end of a musket was about to strike him down, the gory weapon which he drew forth from Columella's corpse swept round and smote the right arm of the new assailant, disabling him on the spot. Then through the deadly turmoil Charles cut his way to the spot where the Princess and the Countess were in the extremest peril. They were on the point of being made prisoners, when Charles rushed betwixt them and their assailants; and he cried to the soldiers, "'Twas I who shouted for the Republic!"

The men at once lowered their weapons; and then, as if with one accord, they turned and rushed to another part of the scene of battle.

It needed but a glance to enable Charles to perceive that it was all over with the cause of the conspirators; and indeed some of them had already begun to retreat to the boats.

"Are you hurt?" he anxiously demanded of the two ladies, as he drew them behind an immense crane which stood upon the Mole.

They were both panting for breath—with their eyes they thanked him for having rescued them from the soldiery—and they shook their heads to reassure him with regard to the question he had put.

A cry of "Fresh troops! fresh troops!" was now suddenly raised: it was a warning which the people, though otherwise cold and apathetic, were giving to the conspirators. And sure enough! there was a strong reinforcement of Tuscan soldiers advancing in double quick time to the scene of conflict.

"To the boats!" exclaimed the Marquis of Ortona; and the cry was taken up by most of the subordinate conspirators.

"Ladies," said Charles hastily, "let me see you in safety to a boat; and then——"

"And then what?" demanded the Princess quickly.

"And then I bid you both farewell!"

"But what will you do?" asked the Princess. "You will be arrested——"

"I will endeavour to make my escape amongst that crowd," responded our hero. "I will not rejoin those conspirators!"

"Oh, Signor De Vere!"—the ejaculation came from the lips of the Countess di Milazzo; but she instantaneously stopped short, almost choked with the emotions which rose up as it went into her very throat.

"To the boats! to the boats!" cried the conspirators; and it was a scene of indescribable confusion which now prevailed in that part of the Mole,—the discomfited adventurers defending themselves desperately against the soldiers, who bore down upon them—the reinforcements rapidly drawing nigh—the ejaculations of the combatants mingling with the moans of the wounded and with the piteous cries of those who were being trampled under the feet of the conflicting parties.

At this juncture a voice suddenly ejaculated, "Thank God, I have found you!"—and the hand

of De Vere was fervidly grasped in that of Nino Corso, the Neapolitan.

"Ah! you here?" cried Charles in astonishment.

"These are the ladies?" said Nino, as he swept his eyes over the forms of the Princess and the Countess.

"Yes," cried Charles, with increasing wonderment. "But you, Nino—"

"Come with me!" said the Neapolitan; and he hurried Charles and the two ladies towards a little house that stood at a distance of about twenty yards,—their passage thither being almost completely screened from the view by a quantity of bales of goods which formed a sort of wall between the crane and that house.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE POSTCHAISE.

THE little house of which we have been speaking, and which stood upon the Mole, was connected with the Customs' Department, and served as an office where a clerk might take an inventory of goods that were landed from ships in that part of the harbour. The door was standing half open: Nino Corso entered—Charles and the two ladies immediately following.

"Now," said Nino, "there is not a moment to lose! The cause is lost! The retreat to the boats will be cut off!"

"But what are you now?" demanded our hero, who, having at length leisure to regard the Neapolitan's appearance, perceived that he wore a species of uniform.

"I am in the Tuscan Custom-house," answered Nino: "and lucky it is for you, Signor De Vere, that I am! Now ladies, hasten ye into that room, and put on the dresses you will find there! Signor, you must assume another garb—and it is in readiness for you! In ten minutes I shall return!"

Having hurriedly spoken these words, Nino Corso quitted the little house, locking the door behind him and taking away the key.

"What does all this mean?" asked the Princess of our hero, while her sister, the Countess, was equally at a loss to comprehend.

"I know that man, and we may trust him!" replied Charles. "Beyond this I am utterly unable to give your ladyships any information: I am as much at a loss as you are to conceive how he should be in a position to help us in this strait. But let us follow his counsel!"

"You have saved our lives, signor," said the Princess; and her dark eyes bent a peculiar look upon our hero. "We will do as you bid us!"

The Countess said nothing: but her own looks shed an unspeakable gratitude upon our hero as she turned to accompany her sister into the adjoining room. There the two ladies found a small trunk containing two complete suits of female apparel, being travelling dresses such as might be worn by persons of a genteel rank in life. While hastily assisting each other in the toilet thus mysteriously furnished, they exchanged a few rapid observations, expressive of their deep regret at the failure of the enterprise, and their anxiety on be-

half of the remainder of the conspirators; while they could not help congratulating themselves on their own safety, which at least was thus far secured. Each at the same instant said something in praise of the chivalrous gallantry of Charles De Vere; and then they both cast down their looks—for a blush was rising to the countenance of each, and they could not endure each other's regards. The secret no longer existed between them, though it was not breathed from the lips of either: but those tell-tale blushes, those downcast looks, and the air of sudden restraint, constituted a mutual revelation. In a word, the Princess comprehended that her sister loved Charles De Vere—while the Countess understood that a similar impression had been made upon the heart of Bianca!

In the adjoining room, Charles De Vere found the undress uniform of a Tuscan subaltern; and as this was the garb to which Nino Corso had pointed, he hastened to clothe himself in it. The exchange of this apparel for his own was quickly made; and the key now again turning in the lock of the door, Nino Corso almost immediately made his appearance.

"Things are better than I fancied, in one sense," he said: "they have succeeded in getting into their boats."

"Ah! I am rejoiced!" said Charles. "And the Marquis of Ortona—does he live?"

"Yes: I discerned him in one of the boats. But methinks he is wounded. The soldiers are springing into other boats in every direction. There will be a chase—but the chances are in favour of our friends. Are the ladies ready?"

At this instant the Princess and the Countess came forth from the adjoining room, clad in the garb which best became their sex; and they had drawn down the veils with which their bonnets were furnished.

"There is not a moment to lose," said Nino Corso; "we must take advantage of the excitement that now prevails—or else every vehicle leaving the city will be presently stopped, and none will be allowed to go out save those whose occupants are provided with passports rigidly in form. Come quick! follow me! Give your arms, Signor, to the ladies."

Our hero did as he was bidden: Nino Corso went on in front; and Charles followed, the Princess leaning on his right arm, the Countess on his left. A tremendous excitement prevailed upon the Mole: the people were rushing down in crowds towards the spot where the conflict had taken place, and where the soldiers were putting off in boats in pursuit of the fugitive conspirators. The little Custom-house and the pile of bales of goods concealed from the view of our hero and the ladies, as they glanced back, the boats in which their late companions had put off; and in a few moments they were surrounded by the crowd through the midst of which they had to make their way. Charles strove to keep Nino Corso in view—which was not always very easy; for he was frequently lost amidst the dense living tide that was sweeping onward. Amidst the excited masses there were several soldiers; and they respectfully saluted our hero—for he it remembered that he now wore the uniform of a Tuscan lieutenant.

In about ten minutes Charles and the two ladies had got clear of the crowd; and Nino, who was

a little a-head, motioned them impatiently to hurry forward. They quickened their pace: the buildings of the town were now reached; and they entered a street along which Nino Corso led them rapidly. He still kept a-head; and thus our hero had no opportunity of putting any questions to him. All of a sudden Nino turned under the arch of a gateway; and thither Charles with his two fair companions followed. In the court-yard to which the gate led, was a postchaise, all in readiness for travelling; and the postilion was in the saddle.

"Quick!" said Nino, as he held open the door for the ladies and Charles to enter the vehicle.

"Are you coming with us?" inquired Charles hastily.

"No. Here is your itinerary."

Nino Corso thrust a paper into De Vere's hand, and closed the door of the chaise. The equipage rolled out of the court-yard, and rapidly made its way through the streets of Leghorn.

It was with the utmost curiosity that Charles opened the folded paper which had been thrust into his hand; and he found that it contained the following list of names:—Terricciola, Volterra, Siena, Asciano, Pienza, and Camerino.

This was the itinerary; and he immediately displayed it to the eyes of the Princess and the Countess, exclaiming, "Our destination seems to be Camerino! 'Tis strange!"

"You knew the late Count well?" said Lucia di Milazzo. "I heard you and the Marquis of Ortona speaking of the circumstance the night before last at Turin."

"Yes—I knew his lordship well. But for what earthly purpose can we be on our way to the town where he has found a sepulchre?"

"We are as unable as yourself," said the Princess di Spartivento, "to afford any solution of the mystery. What did you know, signor, of that Nino Corso who has so effectually yet so mysteriously succoured us?"

"I knew him in Naples. He was then the driver of a public vehicle—devoted to the cause of which your ladyships are likewise the votaries. He was also a faithful friend to the interests of the Count of Camerino. Nothing surprised me more than to encounter him so suddenly as we are now did: methought he had washed his hands of all conspiracies—for I knew that he had faithfully promised his wife Benedetta that he would in future lead a more tranquil life."

"Yet you feel confident," said the Princess, "that Nino Corso is to be thoroughly trusted?"

"Oh, sister!" exclaimed the Countess; "do not facts speak for themselves? If he had meant to play us false——"

"True, Lucia! it was so easy for him to do it! And therefore, signor, under all circumstances," continued the Princess, turning towards our hero, "you will pursue the itinerary which has been placed in your hand?"

"Yes," answered Charles; "for assuredly it cannot be without a motive that we are directed to the town of Camerino. I know enough of Italian geography to be enabled to estimate that it is about seventy miles distant. It is now eleven o'clock," continued Charles, looking at his watch.

"Just one hour," interjected the Princess, with a deep sigh, "since the boats put off from the

ship! How many hearts that were then full of hope, are now either cold beneath the touch of death, or else reduced by discomfiture to despair!"

"I suspected from the first," said Charles, "that the expedition was a mad one; but it is now useless to retrospect regretfully!"

"I fear," said the Countess, in a soft tremulous voice, "that the whole series of adventures will be fraught with many bitter reflections for you, signor;—and not the least poignant must prove that phase of Columella's treachery. We beheld it on the Mole——"

"It was infamous! it was abominable!" exclaimed the Princess vehemently. "To turn against you thus!"

"He was righteously punished," said Charles solemnly; "and yet it grieves me deeply to reflect that I should have been compelled thus to take the life of a fellow-creature."

"Let us change the subject," said the Countess quickly. "You were telling us, signor, that the distance from Leghorn to Camerino is about seventy miles?"

"And though we are going at a rapid pace for the present," observed Charles, "we must presently reckon on travelling at the rate of about eight miles an hour. Allowing for indispensable stoppages, we shall be ten hours ere we reach our destination."

While thus speaking, Charles thrust the itinerary paper into one of the pockets of the postchaises; and his hand came in contact with something which he at once drew forth. It was a bag the contents of which gave forth a metallic sound; and on opening it, it proved to be full of gold coin. The object for which the bag had been placed in the chaise was so self-evident that Charles at once exclaimed, "Even the very expenses of our journey are provided for! This becomes more and more astonishing! Nino Corso could not have done this of himself! But by whom was he employed?"

At this moment the equipage stopped at a barrier where there was a police-station for the purpose of examining the passports of travellers entering the city; but it was very seldom the custom (only in times of disturbance) to adopt this formality with travellers issuing from the place. The ladies exchanged uneasy glances and drew their veils closer over their countenances: but Charles assumed an air of the most perfect self-possession.

"Your passports, if you please," said a *shirro*, opening the door of the chaise.

"Well, this is a pretty proceeding!" bawled out the postilion; "to shut the gate and bar the way in this fashion! I thought officers in the army were differently treated!"

"I beg your pardon, signor," said the *shirro* to Charles, whose uniform he now observed: "but the orders we have just received are so stringent that I must see the passports."

Our hero dared not speak; for he knew full well that his foreign accent would prove him to be no Italian, and suspicion might have been excited. Despite all his presence of mind he felt utterly bewildered how to act, when the Princess suddenly ejaculated, as if smitten by a reminiscence, "Were not the passports given to the courier? To be sure they were!—My good man," she went on

hurriedly to say, now turning to the *sbirro*, "we have a mounted courier in attendance upon us: he is to gallop on in front and order post-horses—he will doubtless overtake us directly——"

"Ah! to order post-horses?" said the official. "Then perhaps this gentleman——"

"Is travelling with despatches from the Governor of Leghorn," rejoined the Princess.

"If the gentleman—your husband or brother perhaps, signora—had only condescended to open his lips for a moment, and proclaimed that fact, he would not have been detained a single instant."

The *sbirro* banged the door, shouting out, "All right!"—the barrier-gate was thrown open, and the equipage proceeded on its way.

"Your Highness's presence of mind," said Charles De Vere, "has extricated us from a very serious dilemma. The position, you perceive, is entirely in our interest—he has evidently been well instructed: but we shall lose him at the next stage—and then we shall find ourselves thrown upon our own resources."

"If, signor," said the Countess, with diffident accents, "you would permit me—or my sister—to repeat two or three times the answer you ought to give when the passports are demanded——"

"I understand!" ejaculated Charles, with a smile. "I should become proficient. Yes! if your ladyship will consent to become my tutoress, I will learn the pronunciation to the utmost of my power."

The lesson was accordingly commenced; and the sweet musical voice of Lucia di Milazzo conveyed to the ear of Charles the precise accent and intonation with which the requisite words should be uttered, in order to explain in the briefest terms that he was the bearer of despatches from the Commandant of Leghorn. But he was not to say that he was conveying such despatches to Florence, inasmuch as the route which the travellers were to take would speedily diverge in a more southern direction. Our hero was an apt scholar—the preceptress was an able one; she raised her veil, naturally enough, in order to render the lesson more impressive; and as he repeated the sentence in which she was instructing him, it was also natural that Charles should look in her face. Nevertheless, we must emphatically observe that no thought nor idea in the slightest degree faithless to the image of his Agnes entered his mind: but the little circumstance which we are now relating seemed to put him and the Countess on a footing of more friendly familiarity than they were before.

"And now," said Charles at length, "I think that I am thoroughly proficient, and that when next the passports are asked for, I shall be enabled to give the proper reply in a manner that will excite no suspicion."

He happened to glance towards the Princess di Spartivento as he thus spoke; and he was startled by the look which she was bending upon him at the moment. She also had raised her veil; and Charles saw that her countenance was pale as if with a deep inward concentrated rage: her eyes appeared to burn like red-hot cinders, and to shoot forth sinister fires. At that instant she was a complete personification of jealous fury. But only for an instant!—her countenance changed in the

twinkling of an eye as the looks of our hero were thrown upon her; and she immediately drew down her veil. The Countess did not notice how De Vere had started; and thus she suspected not that the little incident of her becoming the young gentleman's tutoress had excited such deep passions in the bosom of her sister.

The equipage continued its way; and for some time silence prevailed. Charles reflected upon the singularity, and even awkwardness, of the position in which he was placed,—travelling alone with those two sisters, and as yet in complete ignorance how long circumstances might compel him to remain in their company. The manner in which he had just now seen the Princess looking at him, had revived all that sense of deep loathing and abhorrence with which the assassination of Foresano had inspired his soul; and though for the reasons already set forth, he strove to think leniently and forbearingly of the Princess, he now found that it was impossible. He felt a shuddering sensation while in her society,—that same species of vague cold terror which he would have experienced if it had been possible that at any moment she might throw off the beautiful form of a woman and present herself as a loathsome reptile.

On the other hand he experienced a friendly and almost brotherly feeling towards Lucia di Milazzo, whose looks had never expressed aught but amiability and goodness, except when they glowed with heroic enthusiasm, from the first instant that he had seen her. He could now no longer fail to comprehend that the Princess Spartivento regarded him in a manner to which he could not possibly respond; and it was perhaps even something more than suspicion which he entertained to the effect that he had involuntarily made an impression upon the heart of the fair Lucia. But if this were the case, he felt that he could pity her—he could sympathize with her—he could offer her his friendship, if it would prove a sufficiently consoling substitute for the love which he could not give. Yes—it was true that he could behave towards the gentle and amiable Lucia; while on the other hand he shudderingly revolted from the bare idea of any familiar contact with the more imperious and unscrupulous Bianca.

The equipage pursued its way; and Terriciola was presently approached. Just as it came in view, a person on horseback overtook the chaise and dashed past it.

"That is a messenger from Leghorn!" said De Vere: "there can be no doubt of it! He bears the intelligence of the attempted landing, and he conveys peremptory mandates in reference to the examination of passports!"

"We could scarcely hope to escape without encountering some perils," said the Countess di Milazzo, with a tone and look that were alike replete with fortitude and encouragement. "Only remember your lesson, signor—and perhaps everything will go well!"

"Ah!" said De Vere: "but if that messenger should give such information as may convince the authorities that I am *not* travelling with despatches from the Governor of Leghorn——"

"Or if our escape shall have been discovered," interjected the Princess Spartivento, "it will be destruction—death! Signor," she went on to say, with a strange impetuosity, "you had better think

or saving yourself! Stop the chaise—and flee across the country! Leave us to our fate! We have no right to imperil you! You did not come voluntarily amongst us!—you must not suffer on our account! Why do you not speak in the same sense, Lucia? why do you remain silent instead of supporting my representations?”—and it was almost with an angry petulance that the Princess thus turned to address her sister.

“It is not necessary,” Charles hastened to exclaim, “for her ladyship to follow up the representations of your Highness. I shall not separate from you until I have seen you in a place of safety—or unless adverse circumstances should transpire to remove you from beneath the shield of such poor protection as I may be enabled to offer. In the first place I should deem myself a coward if I were to abandon two ladies in your position; and in the second place I must follow the itinerary which has been placed in my hand, as if it were a destiny that I was pursuing!”

The equipage now reached the gates of Terricciola; and there, to the annoyance of Charles and the ladies, they beheld the messenger who had so recently dashed past, in discourse with three or four *sbirri*. He wore beneath his cloak the uniform of the Government courier; and thus the idea which the travellers had formed of his character seemed to be fully confirmed.

The equipage stopped: a *sbirro* opened the door of the chaise, exclaiming, “Your passports, if you please.”

“I am the bearer of despatches on behalf of the Commandant of Leghorn,” replied Charles, who had no other alternative than to beseech the response; and so well had he profited by Lucia’s lesson that he spoke the sentence with a perfect Italian accent.

The *sbirro* looked dubious—that is to say he hesitated how to act, when the messenger on horseback, turning quickly round, said, “It is all right. I know the gentleman to be the despatch bearer.”

The *sbirro* bowed and closed the door: the equipage at once rolled on—while Charles and the ladies congratulated themselves on this fresh escape, at the same time wondering how it was that they were thus befriended by the messenger.

In a few minutes the chaise stopped at the post-house; and then the postilion, approaching the door, said with a significant look and with rapid utterance, “You have nothing to fear! everything will be right!”

Charles slipped a couple of pieces of gold into the man’s hand; and the equipage was soon out of Terricciola, under the guidance of another postilion.

The assurance which had just been given naturally proved an immense relief to the minds of our travellers; and they found it to be fully borne out when they reached Volterra; for immediately on Charles stating that he had travelled with despatches from the Commandant of Leghorn, the equipage was suffered to continue its way. It was the same at Sienna; and here our travellers stopped for half-an-hour, to obtain some refreshment.

It was about six o’clock in the evening when the journey was resumed; and the chaise rolled out of the city of Sienna. The dusk closed in; but the stars soon began to make their appearance

upon the face of heaven, though the light which they shed only served to show the loneliness of the road which our travellers were now pursuing. It was not however destined that they should continue their way for any considerable distance without experiencing a check; and though the mysterious arrangements by which they were so specially befriended had stood them in such stead, yet they were now fated to experience one of those accidents to which all travellers are liable, most especially on the Continent. To be brief, just as a little hamlet was reached between Sienna and Asciano, the chaise seemed to give way all of a sudden with a shock, and the Countess di Milazzo was thrown into the arms of our hero.

The Princess di Spartivento—who was leaning back at the time, and therefore better sustained the shock—instantaneously threw up her veil; and again did the sinister fires seem to shoot forth from her eyes as she assisted to drag up Lucia from off De Vere’s form. As the starlight streamed into the carriage, Charles caught the flaming of those eyes, and he saw likewise that it was almost with a species of fierce rage that the Princess lifted up her sister. The fore-axle had broken—the chaise had fallen forward—and thus was it that Lucia had been thrown so completely on De Vere, who was sitting exactly opposite to her.

“A thousand, thousand pardons, signor!” murmured the Countess, who was indeed full of confusion; for she was not merely bewildered by the shock, but likewise by the harsh petulant conduct of Bianca towards her.

“Your ladyship has no excuses to offer,” responded Charles, most courteously: “it was an accident; and no one’s fault. I hope you are not hurt, signora?”

The Countess replied in the negative; and Charles, now leaping from the vehicle, assisted the ladies to alight. The extent of the injury sustained by the chaise was soon discovered: the fore-axle had broken, and a part of the mechanism, or “bed of the carriage,” as it is called, had likewise sustained a fracture. Charles looked around: the hamlet seemed to consist of not more than a dozen houses—and its appearance, so far as it might be judged in the starlight, was not such as to promise that it possessed an establishment where the injury sustained by the vehicle could be very readily repaired.

“This is serious!” said Charles to the postilion. “Is there a smith in the village?”

“Yes, signor; but I question whether he can mend it.”

“How far are we from Asciano?”

“Fourteen miles, signor,” was the reply: for though the distances were really computed by leagues, we prefer speaking of miles for the better information of our English readers.

“And from Asciano to Camerico,” said Charles, “is about six miles. So we have got just twenty to complete our journey!”

Four or five of the villagers, including the landlord of the inn, were now upon the spot; and the worst was speedily ascertained,—to the effect that the blacksmith had gone to a neighbouring hamlet and would not be back till ten or eleven o’clock—that on a close inspection of the injury sustained, it was found to be impossible to patch or

cobble up the chaise to enable it to pursue its journey—and that there was consequently no alternative but to wait at the inn.

It scarcely deserved the name of an inn, for it was nothing more than a wretched public-house, and there was only one decent bedchamber to be disposed of. This was of course allotted to the two ladies, who were advised by Charles to take a little rest during the few hours that must inevitably elapse ere the journey could be resumed. He himself anxiously awaited the return of the blacksmith; but it was not until eleven o'clock that this individual made his appearance. He then reported, in the first instance, that it would take him at least four-and-twenty hours to mend the chaise—that he could not possibly do it in less—and that he defied all the smiths in Italy to do the work one minute under the time which he had specified.

"Very well," said Charles coolly: "then you'll be so good as to give me an estimate of the cost before you commence."

The blacksmith named a sum that was tolerably exorbitant; but to his surprise the young Englishman drew forth a couple of gold pieces—which were four times as much as he had asked; and placing them on the table, our hero said, "Just think the matter over again. Is it not possible to do the work in a couple of hours if I give you these two coins?"

A greedy satisfaction overspread the blacksmith's countenance, as he said, "Well, signor, I can't say what I might be able to do if I was to work very hard—harder than I ever worked before!"

"Of course you do not know what you can do till you try. Now set to work; and if you care about having these two pieces of gold, mind that you have finished within the time I have named."

Charles lay down to rest upon three chairs, which were arranged with a blanket for his accommodation in the public room of the inn; and sleep stole over him. He awoke precisely at one o'clock, being the expiration of the two hours accorded to the smith: but on proceeding to inspect the works, he found that comparatively small progress had been made. It had been necessary to invoke the aid of a carpenter; and the only journeyman of the craft in the hamlet had gone to bed drunk; so that it was difficult to wake him up again, and when he was roused he was not fit for much. The consequence was that our hero had to exercise his patience until past three o'clock in the morning. At length the work was done; and it was four o'clock when the ladies being summoned from their room, the travellers resumed their seats in the vehicle and the journey was continued.

Asciانو was reached in about a couple of hours; and now—as the morning was dawning, bright and beautiful in that Italian clime, although it was the first day of December—the equipage was rolling along the road towards the town of Camerino. Charles was full of suspense to know for what purpose he and the ladies had been directed to come to that place—whom they were to meet there—and what incidents were to follow. Was it already arranged that the chaise was to put up in Camerino? did the postilion know whither he

was to drive? had the word been passed on from one postilion to another at every fresh relay? Our hero had some reason to think so; for there had been a certain significance in the look of all these postilions as they successively received the liberal gratuities which he gave them.

At length our hero calculated that the six miles from Asciانو to Camerino must be very nearly accomplished; and he looked forth from the window to see whether he could catch a glimpse of the buildings of the town which was last-named in the itinerary. But at that moment he heard an iron gate swing open; and the chaise turned into an enclosure resembling an English park, except that there were no deer frolicking about. At the same time, a porter, who had come forth from a lodge to open that gate, made a very respectful bow as the chaise swept past. From the window might now be seen the houses and church spire of the little town of Camerino at a distance of about a quarter of a mile: but it was evident that the chaise was not proceeding towards that place. In a few minutes the equipage drew up at the entrance of an immense mansion, of grand and imposing appearance, and with numerous outhouses built in a picturesque style. The marble steps—the vast folding doors—the heavy draperies with gold fringes that might be discerned through the windows—so short, everything which now met the view of the travellers, convinced them that it was a species of rural palace to which they had been brought.

Charles sprang forth from the chaise, and demanded of the postilion, "Are we to stop here?"

"I suppose so, signor," was the reply.

"You were doubtless told to bring us hither?" asked Charles.

"The word was passed to me, signor, by the postilion whom I relieved at Asciانو."

"And what place is this?" inquired Charles.

"It belonged to a great nobleman who died the other day."

"Ah! you mean the Count of Camerino?"

The postilion replied in the affirmative; and Charles, wondering more and more why he should have been directed to come thither, hastened up the marble steps of the front entrance, where a lacquy in a handsome livery, bearing the usual Italian insignia of mourning, had just made his appearance.

"I am told that we were expected here?" said our hero.

"A gentleman is expected here," answered the footman, in the most respectful manner. "Would you favour me with your name?"

De Vere produced his card; and the instant the footman read the name upon it, he made a still lower obeisance than before,—saying, "Be pleased to walk in, my lord."

"You mistake!" cried our hero. "I am not of patrician rank."

The footman again bowed—but said not another syllable.

Charles hastened to the chaise and assisted the Princess and the Countess to alight,—at the same time observing, "All this is very strange!—but I suppose we shall presently learn for what purpose we have been brought hither."

He gave the postilion a liberal gratuity; and the chaise drove away. He conducted the Princess

and the Countess up the marble steps, into the great hall,—where ten or a dozen domestics were now gathered to receive the visitors with every demonstration of the profoundest respect. Two ladies—maids, of very comely appearance, stepped forward; and one said, “Perhaps, signoras, you would like to change your toilets after travelling, and before breakfast is served up?”

The Princess and Countess accordingly quitted Charles, to accompany the maids up a grand marble staircase; while a domestic in a plain suit of mourning, and having the appearance of a valet, accosted our hero, saying, “Will it please your lordship to step this way?”

“Surely I cannot be taken for any one else?” thought Charles: and then addressing himself to the valet, he said, “You give me a title of nobility to which I have no right. But lead on.”

The valet bowed, and conducted our hero up the grand staircase, into an elegantly furnished room, where two elderly gentlemen rose from a table at which they had been seated. The valet retired; and the two gentlemen, advancing towards Charles, bowed with the profoundest respect.

“If I have to thank you, signora,” said Charles, “for the hospitality which is now being experienced by myself and the two ladies who accompanied me, I can only assure you of our sincerest gratitude—”

“Your lordship has naught to thank us for,” replied one of the elderly gentlemen.

Charles started, for the voice was familiar to his ear. Another moment and he recollected where he had heard it! It was the day but one previous at Genoa—and the personage was Signor Palmas.

“Again that title!” ejaculated De Vere. “Signor,” he continued, “this is the third time within the last five minutes that I have been addressed in a manner to which I have not the remotest claim. Tell me therefore, at once, is it possible that there can be any mistake?—for there is something savouring of oriental romance in the adventures which I am now experiencing. Tell me, once more—for whom do you take me?”

“For whom could we take you,” responded the old gentleman, “but for that which you are,—the Lord Count of Camerino.”

An ejaculation of amazement burst from the lips of our hero; and it appeared to him as if he were enveloped in the wild delusion of a dream.

“Yes, my lord,” added Signor Palmas; “permit us in our legal capacity to welcome you as the sole heir of the late lamented Count of Camerino.”

Charles now understood it all! There could be no mistake—no delusion: he found himself suddenly endowed with rank and riches; and staggering as it were beneath the influence of the feelings which seized upon him, he sank gasping for breath, and with reeling brain, upon the sofa.

CHAPTER LV.

THE YOUNG COUNT.

SIGNOR PALMAS hastened to fill a tumbler with water, which he presented to our young hero, who

having imbibed a portion thereof, felt himself refreshed.

“It is true, my lord,” continued the man of business, “that the title and estates of Camerino are now yours. At your lordship’s leisure you shall peruse the papers by virtue of which the bequest was made by the deceased Count. The terms in which the documents are drawn up are most highly complimentary to your lordship. It would seem that the late lamented owner of this princely domain had many peculiar opportunities of judging of your character and disposition; and he was impressed with a sentiment of the utmost admiration for both. With his own hand he traced the memorable words that ‘he felt proud at the idea of being succeeded in his titles and possessions by such a noble-minded individual as yourself.’ Moreover, the late Count was sensible of certain deep obligations which he owed you; and thus gratitude mingled with admiration in dictating the bequest which has rendered your lordship the owner of the domain of Camerino.”

“It appears to me like a dream!” said Charles, pressing his hand to his brow: “and yet indeed it must be a reality!”

“It is a reality, my lord,” answered Signor Palmas: “and may you long live to enjoy the fruits of your good fortune. This gentleman is Signor Benvenuto, a notary of eminence residing in the town of Camerino; and I summoned him, in obedience to the requirements of the Tuscan law, to act as a witness while your lordship is regularly and formally invested with the title and estates of Camerino.”

“Yes, my lord,” said Signor Benvenuto; “I have looked over all the deeds presented for my inspection by Signor Palmas; and everything is perfectly regular and formal. I will now endorse the deeds with the requisite testimony; and there will be no farther need for my presence until the final registration shall take place some days hence before the civil authorities.”

Benvenuto approached the table on which several documents were spread; and Charles drawing Signor Palmas aside into a window-recess said, “Was it not on this subject you were conversing with the Marquis of Ortona at Genoa?”

“Yes—most assuredly, my lord,” replied Palmas. “But you—”

“I was in the adjoining room, and I could not help overhearing a part of your discourse.”

“True, my lord! I recollect now!—the Marquis told me you were in an adjoining room, and that therefore I must speak with caution.”

“Why was I not at once informed of this piece of good fortune?” inquired our hero, somewhat impatiently.

“You are of course aware, my lord,” replied the notary, “that the late Count of Camerino entrusted a sealed packet to the keeping of the Marquis of Ortona—”

“I know it,” said Charles. “It was I who delivered it a year ago into the hands of the Marquis.”

“And the Marquis was instructed not to open it until the Count of Camerino’s death,” continued Palmas. “For security’s sake the Marquis left the packet in my hands, along with other papers of importance; and the other day he sent me a letter to the effect that the Count of Camerino was



dead, and that I was to open the packet and communicate to him the nature of its contents. He bade me meet him at Genoa at a particular time, if possible. The truth is, my lord, the Marquis of Ortona expected to become the heir of the Count of Camerino—or at all events to inherit the greater part, if not the whole of his deceased friend's fortune: and he was naturally anxious to learn how far this hope might be realized."

"I remember overhearing you both express the utmost astonishment at Genoa," observed Charles. "But I do not think that the Marquis gave vent to any bitter expressions?"

"By no means, my lord," replied Palmas: "he is too honourable and too liberal. Amazed he assuredly was—but not embittered. No—neither against the memory of his deceased friend, nor against yourself! On the contrary, he hoped that a successful termination of the expedition to Le-

ghorn would enable him to accompany your lordship to this mansion, that he might see you take possession of your property. But alas! I fear that adversity instead of prosperity may now prove the fate of the gallant Marquis—"

"But tell me," said Charles—"indeed, you have not as yet answered my question—why was I kept in the dark in reference to this great heritage?"

"Ah! I was about to explain," said the notary. "If the Marquis of Ortona were previously anxious to secure the co-operation of so high-spirited and intelligent a personage as yourself, how much was this solicitude increased when by a sudden smile of fortune you had all in a moment become possessor of a proud Italian title and of immense wealth."

"Ah! I comprehend!" ejaculated our hero. "The Marquis was resolved that I should become so deeply compromised and implicated in this con-

spiracy, that when once I had entered upon it I should be compelled to go forward—that retreat would be impossible——”

“Some such calculations as these, my lord,” answered Signor Palmas, “did assuredly have their weight with the Marquis of Ortona.”

“He bade you come in advance,” said Charles, “and prepare the people of this place to receive me. Was it not so?”

“It was my lord,” responded the old notary.

“Ah! and now that I am here,” exclaimed our hero, “dare I look upon this house as a place of safety? Am I not liable to be arrested as a traitor to the Tuscan Government, of which indeed I have now become a subject? In short, tell me frankly and candidly—to what extent I have verily become compromised by the part which perforce I have taken in that disastrous affair?”

“Perhaps your share therein will not become known at all,” answered the notary; “or else, if it do transpire, you can easily give such explanations to the Tuscan Government as will entirely exonerate your lordship from all blame. And now that the enterprise has failed, and that everything is known, the Marquis of Ortona himself will as a man of honour supply affidavits and other written explanations, if need be, to prove that you were not a free agent in the matter. But it is more than probable that you will not be molested on account of that business.”

“And now perhaps, Signor Palmas,” said Charles, “you may be enabled to explain some circumstances which have hitherto been involved in mystery——”

“In reference to Nino Corso and the incidents of your lordship’s journey?” said Palmas, with a smile. “Those explanations are easily given. Doubtless you are aware that Nino Corso has for years been a devoted adherent to the cause of Italian freedom. Some months ago the Count of Camerino procured for him a situation in the custom-house of Leghorn, to which city the worthy hackney-coach driver of Naples accordingly transferred his residence. But it was not only to serve in the revenue office of the Tuscan Government that Nino Corso went to Leghorn: it was also that he might place himself in a position to aid the conspirators, who for a long time past had resolved upon making their next revolutionary experiment at the great Tuscan seaport.”

“I understand,” said Charles De Vere; “and therefore——But are you one of the initiated of the Secret Society? or are you merely speaking from a little knowledge you may have obtained of a few details——”

“I am one of the initiated,” interrupted Palmas: “I flatter myself that I am as good a *carbonaro* as Ortona himself. To be candid with you, my lord, I was once the president of a section in Naples; and I was amongst those who fortunately escaped detection when the Camerino conspiracy exploded awhile ago. Yes,” continued the notary, “I am acquainted with everything—even to the fact,” he added, “that the Princess of Spartivento and the Countess of Milazzo have been your lordship’s travelling companions and are now beneath this roof.”

“I am not surprised to hear you make this statement, signor,” said Charles; “for being ac-

quainted with Nino Corso, it was doubtless you——”

“Yes—it was I who prepared him for particular contingencies which I foresaw might possibly arise. When I left the Marquis of Ortona at Genoa, I took the steamboat at once for Leghorn. On my arrival there I had an interview with Nino Corso: I mentioned your name—he spoke of you in terms of enthusiasm. I told him that if the enterprise should fail it was of the highest consequence that you should be saved from danger if possible—better still if you could be rescued from even a chance of being suspected. Nino promised to be on the alert; and the means of succouring you were devised. The uniform of a Tuscan officer—a postchaise in waiting—the requisite funds for the journey, and to enable your lordship to lavish gold if necessary——”

“I now comprehend that all these arrangements were made by you, Signor Palmas—and I thank you,” said Charles. “But the female dresses for the Princess and the Countess——”

“I shall not hesitate to take credit for the thought,” replied the worthy notary, “because I am proud of it, and I rejoice that the scheme has succeeded. I had heard in the first instance with astonishment, that those two magnanimous ladies had put on masculine apparel on purpose to fight in the cause of Italian freedom. I thought it was all very well that by their heroic example and more than Amazonian fortitude they should inspire the hearts of their male comrades with the most glowing ardour; but I did not see why they should incur risks and perils so utterly incompatible with the tenderness and softness of their sex. I bade Nino Corso be upon the look-out; so that if the enterprise should fail and the patriots should be beaten back from the Mole, the ladies might not be exposed to the murderous fire that would be sure to rake the hosts. Thus certain measures were taken to ensure the safety of the Princess and the Countess in case of need; and by a fortunate coincidence the chivalrous protection which you, my lord, were affording them at the time, had the effect of placing you all three at once within the sphere of the arrangements which Nino Corso was prepared to carry out.”

“But the courier who travelled on horseback,” said Charles, “and who assisted so materially in the safe progress of the postchaise?”

“Ah,” said Palmas, with a smile, “that was well managed—was it not, my lord? The man was veritably what he represented him—a messenger sent off by the Governor of Leghorn to command that the passports of all travellers should be examined with the most scrupulous rigour throughout his district, inasmuch as it was quite possible that some of the conspirators who had landed might have mixed with the populace and have thus got away. Now that particular messenger happened to be an intimate friend of Nino Corso’s—a *carbonaro* himself—devoted to the cause—yielding a blind obedience to his superiors—and while ostensibly performing the duties of his situation, yet on the other hand secretly advancing the interests of the fraternity to which he belongs. Nino gave him his instructions; and as your lordship travelled without a passport, the assistance of that courier became in-

dispensable. At every town that he reached, he took care to leave a message which secured the unmolested progress of your equipage."

"And doubtless," added our hero, with a smile, "the postilions were more or less in the secret?"

"It is notorious," added Signor Palmas, "that all the postilions in Italy belong to the Secret Societies, or else have their sympathies flowing so strong in the same political direction that they are easily made use of in emergencies of this kind. And now, my lord, that I have no further explanations to give, let me again congratulate you on having reached this mansion in safety. In a few days all the deeds of conveyance will be completed and the requisite formalities fulfilled for placing your lordship in complete possession of the title and estates——"

"But I wish to depart for England at once!" exclaimed Charles.

"Impossible, my lord! There are deeds which will require your signature; and there are attestations to be made in the presence of the mayor and justice-of-the-peace in the town of Camerino. Besides, my lord, get through this part of the business as quickly as possible, and when once you have taken up your title of a Tuscan nobleman and demonstrated your allegiance to the Grand Duke's government, no one will be likely to pay any inconvenient attention to the whisper, should it be circulated, that your lordship was mixed up in the little affair of Leghorn."

Our hero saw that the advice was good: and he at once signified his intention of following it.

"I should deferentially recommend your lordship," continued Palmas, "to let the Princess and the Countess pass as your cousins—your friends—your visitresses—anything you like, so long as you conceal their real names and rank; inasmuch as you must afford them your hospitality for the present, until it be ascertained to what extent their names are compromised by recent events."

"And if it be known that they left Turin to accompany this expedition to Leghorn," said Charles, "what may be the results?"

"These are to be considered from many points of view," replied Palmas. "In the first place, I need scarcely inform your lordship that any person or persons who may be caught upon the Tuscan soil, after an attempt to invade a Tuscan city, are liable to the Tuscan laws and must undergo the penalties which they inflict."

"And thus far," interjected our hero, "I am in the same category of dangerous liabilities as the Princess and the Countess?"

"Not so, my lord; for you could prove that you were forced into the business against your will, whereas no such semblance of an apology could be offered for those ladies. They would assuredly be doomed to a life imprisonment in a Tuscan fortress."

The young Count of Camerino, as we may now call Charles De Vere, shuddered when he thought of the Castle of Bagno.

"Therefore," continued Palmas, "it is absolutely necessary that so long as those ladies are in Tuscany, they must be disguised under false names—their identity must be concealed——"

"May they not return to their own State?"

"Not with safety. The King of Sardinia would assuredly hand them over to the Grand Duke of

Tuscany on the demand of this latter potentate; or if by any chance the King were to refuse in the first instance, he would be ultimately compelled to yield by the pressure of Austria. Besides we must not forget that it is an offence subject to severe penalties, according to the Sardinian law itself, for persons to fit out an armed expedition against another and a friendly State——"

"At all events, Signor Palmas," said Charles, "you have stated sufficient to convince me that the present position of these ladies is a precarious one, and that their prospects may become deplorable to a degree. Rest assured that I shall not abandon them in their adversity. But now to another point. It were desirable that I should communicate speedily with my mother, whom I left at Florence—likewise with the British Embassy at Naples——"

"There can be no harm in taking these steps, my lord," answered the notary.

"And I will send off a messenger to England," exclaimed our hero, fervently, "since I am not permitted by the position of my affairs to proceed thither at once in person!—Ah, by the bye, let me ask, have you received any intelligence concerning the unfortunate expedition—I mean in respect to whatsoever events may have followed after I and the two ladies were hurried away from the scene of the conflict?"

"The friendly-disposed courier who travelled on horseback and who rendered your lordship such material assistance, started from Leghorn some little while after you. Our friends—or I will call them the patriotic conspirators, if your lordship will permit me—had just succeeded in gaining their vessel, which was prepared to put out to sea immediately. It was rumoured that the Marquis of Ortona had been wounded; and there can be no doubt that the conspirators experienced an immense loss, chiefly sustained while retreating to their boats. The Castle of Leghorn opened a fire of cannon upon those boats and also on the ship itself—but without any serious result. These are all the details which I am in a position to give your lordship."

The room in which this colloquy took place, was a spacious one; and the discourse was carried on in a low tone, in a window-recess at a distance from the table where Signor Benvenuto was writing. He therefore overheard nothing of what was thus passing. He now rose from his seat, and took leave of the young Count, as well as of Signor Palmas,—who at this juncture devised a pretext to quit the apartment, for he thought that Charles might possibly wish to be alone for a brief space to reflect on the wondrous change which his fortunes had experienced.

And Signor Palmas was right. Our hero *did* indeed wish to be alone. Let it be remembered that when he had fled so precipitately from Florence with the intention of proceeding to England and seeing Agnes, he had not obtained a knowledge of the motives which induced Lord Ormsby to bid him look upon everything as being at an end betwixt himself and the object of his love: the principal impression made upon his mind was that he was held by Lord Ormsby to be disqualified by the want of rank and riches for the hand of the Hon. Miss Evelyn. It is true that he had some dim and bewildering idea of a species of accusa-

tion levelled against him—that is to say, first hinted at by Ormsby and then repeated by Mrs. De Vere; but he attached no particular importance thereto, in the first place knowing that he had done no wrong, and in the second place thinking it possible that in his powerful excitement at the time he might have misunderstood what was said to him.

"And now," he mentally ejaculated, "if the chief obstacle to my union with my beloved Agnes were the want of rank and fortune, that obstacle has ceased to exist! Oh, is it a dream?"

He looked around him: he beheld the splendidly furnished apartment; and clasping his hands together, he exclaimed with thrilling joy, "No, it is not a dream!"

And then a sudden terror seized upon him, as he thought, "Oh, if on account of that fatal expedition my title should be taken from me—my fortune should be confiscated—into what an abyss of misery should I be plunged. But no, no! such a terrible calamity cannot be in store for me! The good Palmes spoke cheerfully, and even treated the matter lightly—and he surely knows! Yes, yes! I must lose no time in having all the formalities completed; and then I will hasten and pay my allegiance to the Grand Duke of Tuscany!"

Cheered by this reflection, Charles now bethought himself of the necessity of explaining his altered position to the Princess and Countess,—unless indeed they already knew it from the handmaidens who had escorted them to their toilet-chambers. He rang the bell; and the valet made his appearance.

"What is your name?" asked Charles.

"Florello, at your lordship's service."

"Then go, Florello, and when the two ladies who accompanied me descend from the toilet-chambers, let them be conducted hither."

"May it please your lordship, the ladies are waiting in the apartment where breakfast is served up," said the valet.

"Lead the way thither."

The domestic accordingly conducted our hero to a room where an elegant repast was spread; and there he found the Princess and the Countess. He made a sign for the servants to withdraw; and when he was alone with the ladies, he said, "Signoras, have you heard anything particular?"

"No!" they both ejaculated at the same time: and then the Princess added, "We do not think that aught unpleasant can have occurred; for the aspect of your countenance denotes not grief."

"Then the maid-servants have hinted nothing to you?" exclaimed Charles inquiringly.

"They maintained a profound silence except when spoken to," replied the Princess. "Yet it struck me that they had an idea we must be ladies of quality; for their demeanour was so profoundly respectful—And indeed it seems as if we have all three been treated with a distinction that could only be shown to the most favoured guests. But who is our host? for the Count of Cambrino is no more!"

"Signoras," said Charles, "prepare yourselves for a most wondrous revelation. The late Count of Cambrino has proved to me the greatest of benefactors—he has left me his heir—In a word, this house is mine, and I am your host, signoras!"

An ejaculation of surprise burst from the lips of the Princess—but the Countess said nothing: yet the tears came into her eyes—and her lips quivered—and the changing colour on her cheeks showed how much she was moved and affected by this marvellous piece of good fortune which had occurred to De Vere. He proceeded to explain what had taken place between himself and the two legal gentlemen; and then, as he did the honours of the breakfast-table, he said, "Signoras, I hope you will consider this house your home so long as circumstances may render it expedient thus to use it."

"Perhaps, my lord," said the Princess eagerly, "we shall be compelled to live with you altogether; for our own estates may be seized—our fortunes confiscated—"

"And if it be so," said the Countess, speaking in a firmer tone than was her wont when addressing her sister, "it is not for us to intrude longer than is absolutely necessary upon the hospitality of his lordship the Count. We may interfere with his plans—we may even imperil him by our presence;—and now I bethink me, my dear sister, there was much wisdom in the words you yesterday spoke when you advised that we should hasten away in some other direction—and you then chided me for not seconding your representations!"

The Princess darted a most angry look upon her sister; and she said, "Circumstances have altered, Lucia—and we have now become veritably dependent upon the chivalrous generosity of his lordship."

"Yes," said Charles, who could not however help weighing in his own mind the selfishness of the Princess against the generosity of the Countess; "ye must remain here, signoras, until we see what turn circumstances may take. Upon this point I have already consulted with Signor Palmes; and following one of the suggestions which the good man threw out, I should propose that you pass as my relations—my cousins, for instance—and ye must both be content to drop your patrician titles for the present and take some humbler name."

This suggestion was agreed to; and Charles then said, "It is required by every idea of decency and propriety that I should immediately go into mourning for the deceased nobleman who left me his heir. As you, ladies, will pass as my relations, it were only consistent with prudence that you likewise should assume mourning garb; for the chief consideration which we now have to keep in view is to avoid exciting any suspicion of a peculiar character in the neighbourhood."

The Princess and the Countess readily assented to this new proposition; and immediately after breakfast the young Count despatched domestics into the town of Cambrino, to command the attendance of tailors and milliners in order that the mourning garments might be made with the least possible delay.

Our hero lost no time in writing the letters of which he had spoken to Signor Palmes. He penned an epistle to his mother, explaining the marvellous piece of good fortune which had befallen him, and stating that he had already taken possession of his mansion and domain. He sent off this letter by a messenger to the hotel where his mother had found him in Florence,—though he was by no means confident that it would find her

there: indeed he thought it more than probable that she might possibly have set off for England with the idea of rejoining him there. However, he felt that he was performing his duty towards his parent in seeking the readiest means with which he was acquainted of communicating with her. He next penned a letter to Agnes; and to her also did he reveal his good fortune,—adding that circumstances imperatively required him to remain in Italy for a few days, but that the moment he again found himself the master of his own time and arrangements, he would proceed with all possible haste to England to learn whether he was destined to experience the highest amount of human happiness or the extremest measure of despair. In neither letter did he mention a syllable relative to the startling and perilous adventures in which he had become involved: he reserved the narrative thereof for another occasion. This letter to Agnes, *De Vere* trusted to the ordinary post; and he wrote a third letter—namely, to the British Ambassador at Naples, apologizing for his protracted absence from his post and at the same time resigning the situation itself.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE SISTERS.

Two elegant suites of apartments, facing each other in the same gallery, were appropriated respectively for the accommodation of the Princess and the Countess. The milliners of the adjacent town were speedily in attendance upon the ladies; and they promised that the required dresses should be supplied with the least possible delay. It was the same with the tailor who waited upon our hero; for the tradesmen of the neighbourhood were naturally anxious to secure the patronage and favour of the new possessor of the Camerino estate and of his cousins (as the two ladies were reported to be).

Charles, having finished his letters, and given orders in respect to their means of conveyance, issued from the library where he had written them, and inquired for Signor Palmas. The worthy notary had however gone into the town, to settle certain formalities with some of the principal tenants on the estate, whom he had summoned to meet him there that they might receive official notice in respect to the entrance of their new landlord into the possession of his domain so soon as the requisite legal ceremonies should have been fulfilled. On learning that Signor Palmas was not at the mansion, Charles proceeded to the drawing-room, where he expected to find the sisters; for he felt that he must not neglect the courtesies which his position as a host rendered it necessary that he should observe towards them.

The Princess only was in that apartment which Charles now entered; and his first thought was to make an immediate retreat—for he shrank from the idea of finding himself alone with her Highness. But as her eyes were at once thrown towards him, he felt that it would be an act of flagrant rudeness to leave the room in such a manner; and he accordingly advanced into it. The Princess rose up from her seat; and Charles was

at once struck by the peculiarity of her looks. She was evidently much agitated: her eyes were vibrating like stars—the colour was coming and going in rapid transitions upon her cheeks—her bosom was heaving and falling as if with the heart's quick palpitations.

"I am glad," she said, "that we at length have a moment alone together! This state of existence is intolerable!"

Our hero was so bewildered and smezed by the suddenness of this address that he could not answer a word.

"You must tell me, my lord," she continued, speaking quickly and in an agitated manner, "whether you still hate and abhor me—or whether you now experience more generous feelings? For myself I had earnestly hoped that I should never again experience any affection save that which was centred in the cause that I had espoused. Indeed, I had vowed that patriotism should be my only love, and my native land the only object of my sympathy! Rash vows! insane pledges! From the instant that I saw you, I felt that my firmness was shaken—that the masculine heroism with which I had sought to invest myself was after all an armour that had left me vulnerable!—and—and—to be brief—I love you, Charles!—my God, I love you more dearly than I can explain! Now will you accept this love of mine? or will you scorn it?"

Our hero had started the instant he began to comprehend the sense of the patrician lady's speech: then he made a gesture of impatience; and now he exclaimed, "Enough, signora—enough! Such an overture ought not to come from your lips!"

The countenance of the Princess became scarlet—for an instant her eyes flashed vivid fires; and then all in a moment her whole demeanour expressed so much humiliation—it seemed to indicate a sense of such deep mortification—that Charles almost commiserated her.

"I know," she said, in a low and tremulous voice, "that my conduct is most indiscreet and unwomanly—most derogatory also to the rank which I bear—aye, and terribly inconsistent with the character of a patriotic heroine which I so lately wore! But Oh! pardon me—have compassion upon me!—let every allowance be made for me!—I am but a poor weak woman after all!"

"Recall what you have said—forget that you have said it," replied Charles,—*"make up your mind to act towards me henceforth as if such words had never been spoken from your lips—and I on my part will forget what has now taken place—or at least there shall be nothing in my future demeanour to remind you of the scene!"*

"You ask me an impossibility!" replied the Princess, with impassioned tone and accents. "Oh, how can I help loving you? Handsome and chivalrous—elegant and accomplished—"

"Signora! I entreat—I beg of you—nay, I must even command—"

"Command me not to love you?" ejaculated the Princess. "Oh, would that you had the power!—for if you mean to reject my love, you could not render me a greater service than by crushing it altogether at the very bottom of my heart! But this you cannot do! Listen to me,

Charles! I will speak! I love you as never woman loved! It is a love that can either melt me into the softest of my sex, or madden me into the wildest and most frenzied! Which is it to be? I can live for you, and make life a heaven for us both;—but I will not live without you—I will go down into the grave even though it be Satan's kingdom itself into which I shall be rushing headlong! Again I say, do not interrupt me! You *shall* hear me out! Do you look upon me as a murderess? Ah there is a God above us, Charles, I became a murderess for your sake! I explained this to you on board the ship—and you know that what I told you was the truth. Have I therefore no claim upon your heart,—I who have risked my own soul for your sake? If you refuse me your love—if you deny me the only solace which can be now offered me—I mean your affection—you will be guilty of ingratitude the most stupendous!"

"Signora," said Charles, who was almost confounded on finding that the Princess was resolved to view the matter in such a light and appeal to him through such a medium,—“what if you compel me to confess that I cannot love you?”

"Only tell me that you do not loathe me—that you do not hate and abhor me," cried Bianca, with a voice and look of the most impassioned entreaty,—"and the assurance will suffice for my happiness! Yes!—because *then* I shall know that the rest will depend upon me! And, Oh! I will win your love! I will lavish upon you the tenderest endearments—I will anticipate your slightest want—I will be your slave! Is this no proof of love? Oh, if a few days back any one had told me that such words as these would ever issue from the lips of the Princess of Spartivento, the prediction would have been scorned and scouted with indignation! But, Oh! love has made me humble—and I could grovel at your feet! Have mercy upon me!"

The Princess sank upon her knees, her handsome countenance upturned towards our hero—her clasped hands outstretched. He was terribly bewildered: he was afflicted and he was horrified: he loathed the woman, and yet he pitied her: he felt it his duty to repulse her—and yet that duty was so harsh, so stern, so cruel he could not possibly perform it!

"Have mercy upon me!" she repeated: and now hope thrilled in her accents, for she thought that he was moved by her entreaties and prayers. "If you do not choose to make me your wife, let me be your mistress! I who was once all pride, am now all humility!—I who was once as strong in women's virtue as ever the best and purest of the sex could be, am now all weakness! Yes—I will be your slave!"

"It cuts me to the very soul to hear your Highness speak thus!" exclaimed Charles. "Rise, lady—rise!" and when he attempted to force her up from her suppliant posture, she seized both his hands and pressed them to her lips. "Rise, signora—I insist!" he exclaimed, now becoming impatient and angry; and he used a degree of violence in raising her of which the moment after he was ashamed. "Pardon me—pardon me, I beseech you, if there were aught unmanly in my conduct!—but this scene must end, signora, both for your sake and mine! You force a certain

avowal from my lips—and now therefore let it be made!—I love another!"

"Ah!" and the Princess started: then she became motionless—rigid in features and in limbs—while a deadly pallor overspread her countenance.

"The avowal is made," continued Charles, recovering his fortitude and his self-possession; "and I beseech that my conduct in making it may be duly appreciated by the feminine delicacy of your Highness. Again I say that if you will recall and forget everything which has now passed—I on my side will so bear myself towards you that you shall have no reason to think my memory retains aught of what has occurred!"

"Tis well. Be it so," said the Princess, with a cold monotony of voice. "I thank you for the proposal. It is a compact."

It seemed as if a corpse were speaking—so pale, so rigid were her features—so fixed her gaze—so cold her manner. Was that the glowing and impassioned woman who a few minutes before had been proclaiming her love in such fervid tones? The contrast was almost incredible: but Charles hoped that the change was a proof of the power of command which the lady was able to exercise over herself.

"Yes—it is a compact, my lord," she repeated; "and I need not say that I understand it to mean that to no living soul—no, not even——" and she gasped for utterance,—“no, not even to my sister——”

"Believe me, signora," interjected Charles, "the secret shall be as sacred as if it were buried in the tomb itself!"

"I hold you to your word—and I thank you."

Thus speaking, the Princess turned and quitted the room. Charles threw himself upon a seat, pressed his hand to his brow, and ejaculated within himself, "I am bewildered and distracted by the scene! Unhappy woman! I cannot help pitying her—and yet my soul recoils from her as if from a reptile whose loathsome nature is not concealed by the beauty of its skin!"

He started up from his chair—he hastened from the room—and he descended into the spacious gardens attached to the mansion. There were avenues of bright evergreens, leading to hothouses and conservatories filled with luscious fruits and beautiful flowers; and there were fountains playing. Charles proceeded along these avenues, giving way to his reflections,—when in obedience to the impulse of his thoughts, he presently ejaculated, "Would that I were away from hence! Though it is my own domain, yet would I sooner be in a certain spot on the good old English soil!"

"My lord," said a sweet voice near, "I was not intentionally playing the part of an eavesdropper—nor did I even know that you were in the garden. But suffer me to exercise the privilege of a friend—and let me ask whether you are unhappy?"

It was the Countess of Milezzo who appeared round the angle at the extremity of the avenue as she thus spoke; and Charles, with that gentlemanly courtesy which was natural to him, hastened to say, "Pardon me, my lady, if you heard from my lips aught which could lead you to believe that I fail to appreciate the honour and pleasure of entertaining such a guest as yourself."

"My lord," replied Lucia, "circumstances have established that privilege unto which I just now alluded. Do permit me to inquire"—and there was something softly urgent in her tone—"do permit me to inquire whether anything fresh has arisen to annoy or alarm you?"

"Nothing, signora—nothing," responded our hero; and then he at once assumed a cheerful aspect.

"It appears to me, my lord," continued the Countess di Milazzo, "that if you only escape the danger incurred by the recent proceedings, you will have everything to render you happy. Ah! and that you *shall* escape from all peril, I am determined!"

"What means your ladyship?" inquired Charles hastily.

"I mean this, my lord," she responded, with a blush upon her cheeks, and yet with the light of enthusiasm in her eyes,—“that the very moment danger menaces you I will perform a duty which I feel is owing towards you! Yes,—my resolve is taken! That instant will I go forward to proclaim that you were introduced involuntarily amongst us—that you sought to retreat, but the laws of the Society would not permit you!—In a word, I will confess everything! And now therefore, my lord,” added Lucia, with a soft earnestness of voice, and at the same time with a bashful modesty mingling with a certain degree of firmness of demeanour, “if you are unhappy on that score, cheer up and banish all alarm!”

"No, signora—no!" exclaimed our hero; "I would not for the world that if such a crisis were to arrive, you should sacrifice yourself for me! No—by heaven, no! I would perish sooner than that this should be done!"

"And I," answered Lucia, emphatically — "I who am guilty, so far as there may be any guilt at all in reference to that conspiracy,—would perish sooner than that you, who are innocent, should have a single hair of your head injured! Yes!—and as you have shown yourself so magnanimous on more occasions than one, it would delight me to have an opportunity of proving that I am not ungrateful!"

The Countess was carried away by the enthusiasm of her feelings in thus speaking; and scarcely had she concluded when a vivid blush again mantled on her countenance, as it suddenly struck her that she had gone too far and that there had been on unseemly ardour in her tone. She lifted her eyes diffidently towards our hero; he was gazing upon her at the instant as he might have contemplated any other woman who had been displaying what he regarded as the loftiest and most magnanimous generosity—admiration was in his looks—and they smote the Countess with a peculiar effect.

"Good heaven! he loves me!" she thought to herself; and almost overcome by the sense of happiness which thus abruptly seized upon her, she would have sunk to the ground if she had not clung to his arms for support. "Oh, Charles—dearest Charles," she murmured in accents which though subdued, were nevertheless sufficiently audible,—“do I indeed fathom the secret of your heart, as you have read mine! Oh, yes—I love you! heaven knows how fondly! But not for an instant should I have had the courage to make the

avowal if your looks had not in the first instance proclaimed your own sentiments!"

She was clinging to him, we say, for support as she thus spoke; and the tenderness of her feelings gave an air of indescribable interest to her soft ravishing beauty. Her large dark eyes were upturned with melting sweetness towards the countenance of our hero; and her fragrant breath fanned his cheek. It was the purest and chastest feminine love which she felt and which she was avowing; and no look, nor movement, nor gesture afforded the slightest indication of a sensual passion. In all this—indeed, in everything—how different was she from her sister!—and amidst all the confusion of thoughts and ideas which Charles experienced, this contrast between the softly fascinating Lucia and the fervid impassioned Bianca was irresistibly forced upon his mind.

"Lady," he murmured, when he had sufficiently recovered his self-possession to be enabled to give utterance to a word, "be not offended with me—accord me your forgiveness—if by an unguarded syllable or deed on my part I should have led you to suppose—And Oh! for heaven's sake be not humiliated—for if I cannot love you otherwise than as a friend, yet Oh! believe me—believe me, Lucia—that this friendship on my part is most sincere!"

The Countess now slowly disengaging herself from the arm to which she was clinging: she retreated a few paces—the deepest blush mantled upon her face—and her looks were cast down in confusion. Then she pressed her hands to her brow with a bewildered air; and Charles thought that a sob was waiting to his ear.

"Lucia, my friend—my dear friend!" he exclaimed, hastening to take her hand; "be to me as a sister—and I will be to you as a brother! Oh, let the sincerest friendship—the purest fraternal love exist between us!"

The Countess raised her looks, where mingled confusion and gratitude, tenderness and bashfulness were struggling and agitating; and she said, "You are as kind and as generous as you are gallant and noble-minded! It was impossible to be your companion through so many strange adventures and thrilling incidents without being impressed by a sense of your many excellent qualities—and therefore it was impossible to help loving you! I mistook your feelings—but I experience no humiliation because your generous kindness saves me from sinking down in my own esteem. Yes, Charles—I will be to you as a sister!"

Then, with all the ingenuous frankness which belonged to her nature, the Countess presented her cheek to our hero, who kissed it; and Agnes herself need not have been offended thereat if she had been concealed amongst the evergreens and witnessed the incident.

"Doubtless your heart is already engaged?" said Lucia.

"Yes. To you will I speak with all frankness. I love a beauteous creature—amiable and good, as you yourself are—Her name is Agnes Evelyn—she is the daughter of an English peer—and which though there has been some little misunderstanding in a certain quarter, yet do I venture to hope that all will yet be well."

"Oh! my prayers shall unite with yours to that effect!" exclaimed Lucia. "And now that I

understand the footing upon which you and I are henceforth to regard each other, I am happy and contented—I experience no jealousy—heaven forbid!—and I am prepared to love your sweet Agnes as dearly as if she were my sister! But there is one thing, Charles,” added the Countess, hesitatingly, and with some little confusion and agitation. “It is not my purpose to mention to Bianca what has taken place—and therefore in her presence I shall be guarded in the mode in which I address you. And now, lest she should think it strange that I should be absent from her so long, I will hasten to retrace my steps.”

Bestowing upon our hero a smile of the sweetest sisterly affection, Lucia glided away from him and returned into the mansion.

We intimated that if Agnes Evelyn herself had been concealed amongst the evergreens she need not have experienced a pang of jealousy on beholding the chaste kiss which Charles bestowed upon the cheek of the charming Countess. But though Agnes was not present in that garden, yet there was another to be a witness of the scene;—and this was the Princess of Spartivento. She had observed from the window of her apartment that the young Count of Camerino was walking in the garden; and then she beheld her sister Lucia enter the grounds. A jealous rage was already in her soul; but now it boiled up into the fiercest frenzy.

“Ah, he loves another!” she muttered to herself; “and he had the audacity to tell me so! Yes—he loves Lucia! It is but too evident! He loathes and abhors me who did so much to save him!—his heart is devoted to Lucia who has done nothing on his behalf! And am I to be thus sacrificed by the ungrateful Charles to that soft-speaking hypocrite of a sister of mine! No—never! But let me hear what passes between them.”

Bianca descended into the garden, and at once concealed herself amongst the evergreens. She soon found that if she attempted to get too near the spot where the interview between Charles and Lucia was taking place, she would betray her presence by the rustling of the evergreens: she was therefore compelled to remain at a certain distance. And thus, inasmuch as she beheld everything, but heard nothing, it was only too natural that she should form a most erroneous impression of what was passing.

“Ah! she clings to him for support! she is overcome by the feelings of joy and ecstasy with which the language of love flowing from his lips, inspires her! And how she gazes up at him! and his looks are riveted upon her countenance! Oh, if I were near enough, I should doubtless perceive the transfusion of passion’s fervour in those mingling and blending regards! And now she retreats a pace or two!—Yes, she is overcome by the immensity of her own happiness! He rushes forward—he takes her hand! Ah! and now they speak earnestly together!—and, Oh rage! fury! the wanton presents her face to receive the amorous kiss! Revenge, revenge!”

The Princess felt as if she could rush forth from her place of concealment and spring upon her sister like a tigress: but she controlled her feelings; and as an expression of demonic vindictiveness passed over her naturally handsome

countenance, rendering it hideous for the moment, she muttered to herself, “I must work in secret!—in secret must I be avenged! Yes!—and who can tell if Lucia were once removed but that the young Englishman might yet be mine?”

The Princess retreated from the garden, and hastened up to her own suite of apartments. Seeking the elegantly-furnished boudoir, she dismissed the handmaiden who was putting it in order; and locking the door, she threw herself upon a sofa to give way to her reflections.

“Yes—revenge, revenge!” she murmured between her lips. “Revenge!” she ejaculated in a louder tone: “revenge first—and perhaps love afterwards! But the means for this vengeance? Where? how? Ah! I feel in such an evil and desperate mood that I could almost kneel and pray that Satan himself would send one of his fiends in human shape to succour me, even though the price were the loss of my own soul!”

Scarcely had the Princess given utterance to these words in a voice which swelled into a louder and louder tone with the growing vehemence of her excited feelings—scarcely, we say, had the last syllable leapt from her tongue, when a large mirror on the opposite side of the room, and which reached down to the floor, opened inward, and a hideous-looking female made her appearance.

The reader has seen enough of the Princess to be aware that she was a woman of the most dauntless courage, and indeed of an Amazonian heroism; but the strangeness and suddenness of this incident was sufficient to startle and even alarm the most intrepid of human beings. Bianca however immediately recovered herself, on acquiring the certainty, at a second glance, that she was veritably a creature of flesh and blood. She was about fifty years of age—very short in stature—as shrivelled and dried as a mummy—but with a largely chiselled aquiline profile. Her well-preserved teeth gleamed with a ghastly whiteness in contrast with the swarthiness of her complexion; and her eyes shone with an extraordinary lustre. She was decently but plainly dressed; and instead of a cap she wore a parti-coloured silk kerchief bound about her head, the grisly locks forming a sort of fringe to this gaudy turban. The reader may perhaps have already recognised the woman; and it now occurred to the Princess of Spartivento that she herself had seen her before.

“Who are you?” was the question which Bianca nevertheless put as she advanced from the sofa, whence she had started up on the first appearance of this hideous-looking creature.

“Has your Highness forgotten me?” inquired the woman, closing the looking-glass door behind her.

“Ah! you know me then? Yes! and we have met before! But where?”

“On the field of Novare,” was the woman’s response.

“True!”—and as the recognition was now complete, it was with a sudden look of loathing, terror, and abhorrence that the Princess recoiled from the presence of that woman.

“What! your Highness is thus exquisitely fastidious?” she said, with a mocking laugh. “Be-think yourself, proud lady, of the words to which your lips ere now gave audible utterance—and



which words reaching my ears, led me forth from my place of concealment!"

The Princess shuddered visibly: she remembered how impiously she had spoken of invoking one of Satan's agents; and it actually appeared as if the wish that had been more than half-expressed, was now experiencing its fulfilment.

"A lady who could give utterance to such sentiments," proceeded the woman, "must indeed stand in great need of such succour as I only could afford."

"Ah, true!" ejaculated the Princess, as all her thoughts of vengeance came trooping back into her mind. "Pardon me if my conduct seemed insulting! Yes—I recollect! it was on the field of Novara—I was supporting a dying husband in my arms——"

"And I gave you a cordial, signora—and balm—and bandages."

"Yes, yes!—and I ought now to thank you as
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I thanked you *then*——though, alas! your aid was unavailing!"

"Your Highness gave me a purse of gold on the battle-field; and it was not therefore likely that I could have forgotten the voice or the countenance of one who dealt so bounteously with me."

"And what was it that you told me at the time?" asked the Princess, speaking quickly, and with a certain degree of nervous agitation. "Did you not say that those who died in the cause of Italian freedom should be terribly avenged?—did you not declare that you yourself——"

"Proceed, signora," said the woman calmly. "No doubt I stated everything that you are now repeating."

"Yes!" continued the Princess, with petulance in her accent—for she had wished the woman to finish the sentence for her: "you said—I think—did you not?—you said that if you carried cordial
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and balm over the battle-field for the wounded patriots—was it not thus that you spoke?”

“Your Highness evidently recollects well the very words that came from my lips,” replied the woman, with the most provoking coolness. “You had better finish.”

“I will do so,” continued Bianca, “and you will tell me whether I am right. You said—you said—that if you had cordial and balm for the wounded Italians, you had deadly poison for the Austrian enemies—and you vowed that you would go over the battle-field, and that wherever you beheld an Imperial soldier in whom the spark of life yet lingered, you would make his death sure.”

“Yes, signora—it was thus that I spoke,” said the woman. “And then what followed?”

“What followed?” repeated the Princess inquiringly.

“Aye—what followed? Does your memory now fail you? I will refresh it. Your Highness levelled at me the bitterest reproaches—called me murderess—likened me to the jackal that preys upon the dead—execrated me as a wretch that fought with unfair weapons! I went away, while pitying and laughing at you! But you have not forgotten all this! No! for it was the recollection thereof that made you ere now recoil shudderingly from me at the moment of recognition! Yet strange! the woman whom you despised on the battle-ground, has now come to answer your invocation! Speak, lady! How can I serve you? what do you require of Satan’s agent?”—and the woman burst out into a horrible laugh.

“How came you here?” demanded the Princess, experiencing a cold shudder at the sound of that sardonic laughter.

“I need have no secrets from your Highness; for we are mutually in each other’s power.”

“Ah!”—and Bianca started visibly.

“Yes! is it not so? Am I not aware that you are the Princess of Spartivento—that your sister the Countess of Milezzo is with you—and that together with the new Count of Camerino, you escaped from the conflict at Leghorn? This morning, when you and your sister were alone together for a few minutes in this very room, you said sufficient to make me aware of all the circumstances whereby you are surrounded.”

“And the other persons beneath this roof? the servants of the household?” said the Princess, becoming frightened.

“They know nothing—they are even ignorant of the existence of this secret passage:” and the dame pointed towards the looking-glass door.

“Thus your Highness perceives that I know everything: but I do not wish to injure you—nor your sister—nor the young Count. On the contrary, we may render mutual services—”

“But you said that we should also be in each other’s power?” interjected the Princess.

“Well,” resumed the woman, “and that will be the case when I come to reveal, as perforce I must, who I am: for though you saw me on the battle-field—”

“I know not your name. What is it? And who are you?”

“Perhaps you will start when I answer your questions. But no matter! I am La Dolfin—”

“Ah!” ejaculated the Princess; “you are the

woman who was in some way or another mixed up with the Marchioness di Mirano at Florence?”

“And now you know, Princess,” interjected La Dolfin, “that in obeying your invocation I have the power to further your designs.”

“You are proscribed—a reward is offered for your apprehension—is it not so?”

“Yes. Immediately after the explosion of the affair in reference to the Marchioness, the new Minister of Police who succeeded Count Ramorino, set a price upon my head.”

“And how came you to be concealed here?” demanded the Princess.

“From what your Highness previously knew of me in reference to the battle-field of Novara,” replied La Dolfin, “you can have little trouble in conjecturing that I belong to one of the Secret Societies. Some years ago—no matter under what circumstances—it is now too long a tale to tell—I became the bearer of certain important despatches for the Count of Camerino. It was on that occasion I was initiated into the existence of the secret passages and staircases within the walls of this mansion; for a conclave of patriots was wont to assemble here.”

“Proceed,” said the Princess, whose memory reverted at the moment to the subterranean of her own palace at Turin. “You have told me how you learnt the existence of these secret places some years ago; but you have not told me how it is that I now find you an inmate of them.”

“Exactly one month ago I was compelled to flee from Florence. On the road I was stopped and plundered of everything that I possessed; so that all in a moment I was reduced from comparative affluence to a state of complete destitution. I crawled along as well as my feeble limbs would allow me, until at the expiration of a few days I learnt the result of the Marchioness di Mirano’s affair in Florence, and how I myself was proscribed by the new Minister of Police. Then I determined to come hither—”

“You would scarcely have expected,” interrupted the Princess, “that the late Count of Camerino, on discovering your real character, would have been very ready to succour you?”

“I scarcely know what I thought, or what I calculated,” rejoined the woman, “beyond the hope of escaping arrest. Perhaps I might have fancied that I knew too many of the Count of Camerino’s secrets to render it safe for him to refuse me an asylum. However, I came hither—I concealed myself in the subterranean—and after a little time I learnt, by a conversation which I overheard between some of the servants, that the poor Count was dead. I have remained here until now.”

“And how have you subsisted?” inquired the Princess.

“Occasionally emerging from my place of concealment, by means of that secret door”—and she pointed towards the looking-glass—“I have paid a visit to the larder. A very little food has sufficed for me; and as there was a numerous establishment of servants, there was always a sufficiency of provender to enable me to take as much as I required without standing the chance of exciting the suspicion of the stealthy visits which were thus paid to that place.”

"And now, doubtless you are anxious to get away?" said the Princess.

"Yes; I cannot for ever live in that horrible solitude," answered La Dolina. "If your Highness will promise to furnish me with a disguise as well as with a little gold, I will in return render you whatever service I may be enabled to perform. You spoke of revenge—you said revenge first and perhaps love afterwards! Tell me how I can aid you? Will you have a subtle poison wherewith to wreak your revenge?—will you have a love-philtre, that the individual to whom your heart yearns may be made to love you in return?"

"Try not your jargon concerning love-philtres with me!" interrupted the Princess. "I am not to be deluded by such idle trickery. But the poison! Ah, *that* is another thing!—and to your proposal on this score I say yes. Give me the poison—and I will furnish you with gold, and also a safe disguise, to enable you to depart hence."

"It shall be a compact," said La Dolina. "Do you want a poison to kill outright—or one that shall operate gradually, so that it may seem as if the patient were sinking under some malady?"

"Let it kill outright," interrupted the Princess, "provided that it leave no trace behind, and if you can guarantee that not even the most skilful physician could detect the cause of death."

"Think you, Princess, that I am so ill-practised in the art," asked La Dolina, "that I cannot present such guarantees as those which you require? Your intended victim shall be stricken down after imbibing the poison I will give you; and the physician who may be called in, will pronounce it apoplexy. But I have not all the requisite materials for compounding the drug. I can steal forth at night and procure from the garden certain roots which I need; but there is one which only can be purchased at a chemist's or a herbalist's—and I dare not venture into the adjacent town for the purpose."

"Could I myself procure it?" inquired the Princess, "without exciting suspicion? I mean, that after some one shall have died suddenly, would it be likely to occur to the chemist of whom I may make the purchase, that the article thus bought may have been connected with the catastrophe?"

"Your Highness will incur no danger on this score; for the article itself only becomes so deadly in its effect when it is in combination with the other ingredients that I shall use."

The Princess reflected for a few moments; and then she said, "I will procure the drug. Tell me its name."

La Dolina answered the question; and the Princess went on to say, "It is scarcely possible that I can to-day make any excuse for visiting the adjacent town. But to-morrow it may be different."

"Take your own time, Princess. I will show you the secret of opening this looking-glass door, so that your Highness can come to me; or else to-morrow night, when everything shall be quiet throughout the mansion, I can come to you."

The horrible woman—more hideous in disposition than even she was in person—showed the Princess the secret to which she had alluded; and she then quitted the apartment, retiring by way of the looking-glass door, and leaving the Princess

to reflect moodily over the interview which had taken place and the compact which had been made.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE PLACARDS.

SIGNOR PALMAS was occupying an apartment within the walls of the mansion; and Charles was glad to have his company at the dinner-table, so that he might not be left to the species of embarrassment in which he knew he should have been placed if he were altogether alone with the sisters. They retired early to their respective chambers; and awoke in the morning to meet between nine and ten o'clock at the well-appointed breakfast table. In the middle of the day the mourning raiment was delivered for the use of the ladies and of the young Count; for the milliners and the tailor had toiled unceasingly to get the work finished. Signor Palmas went into the town to visit Signor Benvenuto, and expedite the settlement of the requisite formalities in respect to the final establishment of our hero's rights; and in the meantime the young nobleman determined to render himself better acquainted than he already was with his new abode. As a matter of courtesy, he requested the sisters to accompany him in his tour of inspection through the spacious premises. And now therefore behold him with the Princess and Countess leaning on his arms, visiting the beautiful picture gallery and then the museum of statues which formed part of his palatial residence. Everywhere were they encountered by the evidences of the refined taste as well as of the wealth of the late Count of Camerino; and the more they saw of the mansion, the better were they enabled to comprehend the vastness of the expense that must have been incurred in its adorning and embellishment.

When Signor Palmas returned in the afternoon, he sought an opportunity of observing to our hero, "Here is the key, my lord, of the bureau in the library where the late Count kept most of his correspondence. You will perhaps choose to look over the documents which you will there find, inasmuch as you may light upon papers of interest, and even of utility, in respect to the management of the estate; while on the other hand there may be some political correspondence which under existing circumstances you might deem it prudent to destroy."

Our hero took the key, thanking the worthy lawyer for his attention; and he proceeded to the library. Opening the bureau, he commenced the examination of the papers which he found there; and presently the idea entered into his head that there might be some secret drawer or recess concealed in that bureau; for to a certain extent it resembled a desk which belonged to the British Ambassador at Naples. That desk had secret recesses for the better safeguard of important diplomatic papers; and Charles beheld certain indications about the desk which he was now examining, which led him to fancy that it had contrivances on the same plan as the other. He was not long in discovering that his surmise was perfectly correct;

and in a secret drawer he found a sealed packet addressed simply, "To MY HEIR."

The first impulse of the young Count was to hasten to Signor Palmas and show him the packet; but the old notary at once said, "You must not break that seal, my lord, in my presence. There is so much secrecy in respect to the way in which the packet was disposed of, that it can only be for the eyes of the heir to glance over its contents. Return, my lord, to the library; and in the solitude thereof ascertain what instructions your deceased benefactor has left you. If they be of a secret character, breathe not another syllable on the subject to me; and rest assured that I shall ask your lordship no impertinent questions."

Charles accordingly sped back to the library; and locking himself in, he opened the packet. It contained a letter addressed like the superscription on the envelope—"To my heir;" and then followed these lines, written in the well-known hand of the Count of Camerino:—

"It is proper and needful that whosoever becomes the master of this mansion, should be acquainted with its mysteries. In the boudoir of the suite of Crimson Apartments, there is an immense mirror which reaches to the floor. The gilt frame is carved to represent wreaths and festoons of flowers as well as of vines laden with grapes. If you press hard upon the centre of the large rose on the left-hand side of the frame, at the same time pressing upon the lowest grape of the bunch nearest above that rose, the effect will be to make the entire mirror itself open as if it were a door. It is unnecessary to give directions in respect to the opening of this door from inside of the passage with which it communicates, inasmuch as the spring is visible and easily discovered.

"But now to another point. In the back garden, close by the large conservatory, there is a summer-house, with a table standing in the middle. Look underneath; and exactly facing the northern side of the summer-house, you will perceive what at first appears to be a large knot in the solid leg of the table. Press upon it hard with the ball of the thumb—the table will turn round and reveal an opening. By these means you may reach the subterranean communicating with the staircase and passages leading to the mirror-contrived door.

"The mystery of these contrivances may some day or another be serviceable:—who can tell? Therefore let not the secret be lightly revealed; but rather let it be treasured up in your own breast, to be confided only to those whom circumstances may point out. Indeed, you must not suppose that you are now the sole depositor of this secret. It is known to several; but with *them* it is safe. If you understand my meaning, well and good; but if it be otherwise, you need not by any means seek to learn it."

Such were the contents of the document which so singularly fell into the possession of our hero. It bore no signature; but as we have already said, it was in the well-known handwriting of the late Count of Camerino. And Charles *did* comprehend that nobleman's meaning. The subterranean, entered by means of an aperture disclosed by a turning-table—all this was not quite new to

him; and he had recently experienced at the Spartivento Palace in Turin sufficient to enable him to understand why there were such hidden places in the mansion which had now become his own property. He was about to fold up the letter, when his eye caught a direction at the bottom, to "turn over;" and he perceived that there was writing on the other side. This ran in the following strain:—

"Under the central stone in the large subterranean hall, there is a tin box containing a number of letters. To me, so long as I live, they are valuable, inasmuch as they were penned by the hands of patriots whose noble example inspires me with additional courage and perseverance on behalf of the grand cause to which I have devoted myself. But when I shall be no more, it will become needless to preserve those letters: indeed it were more prudent to destroy them; for by an accident might their existence possibly become known—and in this case they would compromise those whom I love and with whom I have acted. Therefore, to you, my heir, do I assign the task of destroying those documents within the shortest convenient period after this packet shall have fallen into your hands."

"We need hardly inform our readers that Charles determined to obey the instructions of his benefactor; and he resolved that in the silence of the ensuing night his visit should be paid to the subterranean. But while he was reflecting on the subject, it occurred to him that the suite of Crimson Apartments had been allotted to the Princess of Spartivento. It was therefore in her boudoir that the mirror-door existed; but little did our hero think that she was already well acquainted with the mystery.

"I will penetrate thither," he said to himself, "by means of the entrance from the summer-house."

He locked up the papers in the bureau, and descended from the library into the garden, that he might inspect the particular summer-house to which allusion has just been made. He discovered the key to the secret spring; but he now pushed his investigations no further, reserving them for the hours when darkness should be upon the scene.

As he was now clad in his mourning, Charles thought himself of the fulfilment of a duty which he owed to the memory of the deceased Count; and this was to visit the tomb which the Marquis of Ortona had ordered to be raised over the resting-place of the departed in the church of the adjacent town. Indeed the monument had only been completed the day before: and Charles had received an intimation to this effect from Signor Palmas. Towards the sacred edifice did he repair: the church door stood open, for the sexton was engaged in sweeping it out. The monument was soon found; and there stood our hero for some moments, praying inwardly and with deepest devotion for the eternal welfare of him to whom he was so much indebted. The sexton judged who he must be by his mourning raiment and by his attitude at that tomb; and it had moreover been rumoured through the town that the new Count of Camerino had arrived to take possession of his estate. The sexton waited till Charles left the neighbourhood of the monument; then the old

man stepped forward to welcome the young lord, and Charles thrust a piece of gold into his hand.

On issuing from the church, our hero perceived a man posting a large bill against a wall where there were already several placards. Certain words which instantaneously met De Vere's eye, led him to cross over and peruse the entire bill with attention. It was to the effect that whereas a most audacious and piratical attack had been made upon the town of Leghorn—but whereas such attack had signally failed, and the traitorous desperadoes had been beaten off with immense loss—yet whereas it was rumoured that some of the conspirators had escaped amongst the populace, and were supposed to have succeeded in getting into the interior of the country, it was made known by that proclamation that any one who would give up such conspirators to the authorities, should receive a specified reward. A notice was further given to the effect that any one of the conspirators who had so escaped, who would give proofs of contrition by delivering up his recent accomplices, should receive a full pardon.

"By heaven!" thought Charles to himself, "this may possibly be serious, if any of those postillions who drove us should be incited by the hope of reward to turn round and betray us! And yet I have heard strange tales of the wonderful stanchness which prevails amongst the working classes and poorer orders when mixed up in political affairs. And then too, it certainly is not by fleeing the country that I can fulfil the formalities which are to confirm me in the possession of my estate and tend to put me in a position to prove my allegiance to the Grand Duke."

Charles was about to turn slowly away with these reflections, when his eyes were attracted towards one of the older placards which were upon the same wall. He beheld the name of La Dolfinia; and he remembered that an infamous woman bearing that denomination had been mixed with the affair of the Marchioness di Mirano. He therefore paused to read this particular placard to which we are alluding. It set out by stating that whereas a woman bearing such a name and of such a description (which description was most minutely given) had for some years past practised the most diabolical iniquities in the City of Florence, whence she had recently fled, it was determined by his Excellency the new Minister of Police to adopt all possible measures to bring the woman to punishment. A reward was therefore offered for her apprehension; and in order that she might not be harboured or concealed even by her most intimate friends, severe penalties were decreed against any persons so offending. Moreover, to increase the probabilities of ensuring her capture, there was the following somewhat curious provision made:—"If any person having by any means offended against the law, save and except for the crime of murder, shall become instrumental in handing the said woman La Dolfinia over to the grasp of justice, such person, whether male or female, shall receive a prompt and full pardon for whatsoever offence he or she may have committed, the crime of murder always excepted."

"And thus," thought Charles to himself, "the authorities seem determined to have La Dolfinia; but perhaps she is far enough away by this time!"—for he no more suspected that the wretch of in-

famous repute was in the subterraneans of his own mansion, than he was enabled to conjecture that the secret of those subterraneans was known to the Princess.

He retraced his way homeward, and told Signor Palmas how he had read the placard offering a reward for the discovery of the conspirators.

"You might have been tolerably well assured, my lord," answered the worthy notary, "that something of this sort would be done by the authorities; but it by no means follows that the proclamation should experience any success."

"But the postillions and the courier?"

"Staunch as Nino Corso himself!—and I am sure that you would not for a moment permit any one to question the integrity or fidelity of that individual."

In the meanwhile the Princess di Spartivento—who was dissembling in her manner towards her sister—had proposed to Lucia that they should walk into the town together, to make some few little purchases to complete their mourning. Lucia at once agreed; and unsuspecting of any sinister or ulterior intent, accompanied Bianca. The fact was, the Princess thought it would seem suspicious, or at least strange, if she were to go out alone under existing circumstances; and so she was in a manner compelled to request the society of Lucia. They entered the town; and their attention was speedily attracted towards the placard which had been newly put up; and then the eyes of the Princess were riveted upon that proclamation which related to La Dolfinia—whereas in respect to this latter one the Countess di Milazzo was as a matter of course perfectly indifferent.

"You see, Bianca," she said, indicating the first-mentioned placard, "that it is suspected some of the conspirators escaped from amidst the conflict at Leghorn. Oh! would it not be terrible if any harm were to befall our chivalrous young host at the very instant when the sun of so much prosperity would otherwise be shedding its light upon his head?"

Lucia made these remarks with the most ingenuous candour of look as well as with the utmost sincerity of heart; for her mind had acquired a wondrous equanimity since she had determined to love our hero only as a sister might love a brother.

"Yes," answered the Princess, while the blood mantled on her cheeks, and then in another moment quitted them altogether; "it would be a horrible catastrophe if any evil occurred. We must be cautious, Lucia! Let us not remain too long in the town. The less notice we attract, the better. Do you go to one shop, while I go to another."

This arrangement was followed; and the Princess was thereby enabled to separate herself temporarily from her sister while she purchased the drug which she had undertaken to procure for La Dolfinia.

The sisters presently returned together to the mansion; but they had no opportunity of speaking to the young Count until the party were assembled at the dinner-table. Then, on the Princess observing that she and Lucia had been into the town to make some few purchases, Charles alluded to the placard in reference to the conspirators, for he felt assured that the ladies had seen it; and he expressed his determination to remain at the house

and trust to the current of events. Signor Palmas repeated the encouraging words which he had before spoken to our hero; and then the conversation was turned by the latter into a new channel.

The evening passed away without any incident worthy of notice; and shortly after Charles had retired to his chamber, he disposed with the attendance of Florello for the night. When he fancied that all was quiet within the walls of the mansion, he took with him the means of procuring a light—he stole down from his apartment by a private staircase—and he passed out into the garden. It was a moonlight night: he soon made his way to the particular summer-house which has before been mentioned; and pressing on the hidden spring, he found that the table, which stood on a massive pedestal, being two feet and a half wide at the base, moved completely round, disclosing an aperture of about the size which the base itself had covered. Our hero unhesitatingly committed himself to the descent of stone steps which led down the opening; and then it was that he lighted the lamp which he had brought with him. Before he completely closed the massive woodwork over his head, he made himself acquainted with the precise working of the spring, so that he should not be at a loss how to effect his egress from the place when his business there should be finished.

He descended the steps slowly and cautiously—tot because he for a single moment suspected that there was anybody there, but for fear lest any of the stone stairs should be broke, or that the currents of air should extinguish the lamp. The bottom of the flight was reached: Charles pursued a stone passage for about twenty yards; and then he reached a good-sized apartment, which he felt convinced was the hall of assemblage alluded to in the deceased Count's letter. There was a little square trap, or *guichet*, in the door leading into it, so that pass-words or other communications might be exchanged when the conclave was sitting, between the door-keeper inside and anybody approaching by way of the passage. There were likewise numerous forms and benches in the hall, and a small raised dais with an arm-chair for the presidential seat. Our hero remembered all he had seen at the Spartivento Palace; and with a shuddering sensation he thought within himself, "I wonder whether this hall has beheld any scenes so hideous and awful as that which in its association with the name of Fossano has become so indelibly impressed upon my memory!"

Charles proceeded to examine the floor of the hall of assemblage: it was paved with large stones; but the stone in the centre was of much smaller dimensions. Our hero had not been unmindful of the probability of experiencing some little difficulty in raising the stone; and he had therefore brought with him a long poniard, which he found in his apartment. By the aid of this implement he quickly raised the stone; and beneath it he found a tin box, which contained a quantity of letters. Charles considered the correspondence to be sacred: he was accordingly about to commence the destruction of those documents on the spot, when he was suddenly startled by the sound of a door closing somewhere within the subterraneans. He paused and listened with suspended breath; but all was now still. That it was no mere freak of the fancy on his part, he felt perfectly convinced;

while he was also confident that it was no door which he himself had neglected to shut that could have occasioned the noise. He therefore determined to penetrate further into the vaulted mass with which his mansion was undermined.

"What said the Count's letter?" he asked himself. "Did it not inform me that others were acquainted with the secrets of this place?—and inasmuch as it has evidently been a point of *rancorous* for the conspirators at different times, it is probable that there are several hundred persons who have a knowledge of these subterraneans and of the mysterious modes of gaining access to them. Who knows, then, but that some one may now be concealed here? Perhaps more than one person? Strange that this idea did not occur to me before! I will satisfy myself on the point. But Ah! these papers! I may be suddenly surprised on this spot—and others may be less scrupulous than myself with regard to the documents! I will replace them while I search."

In his haste to put back the papers into the tin box, Charles scattered three or four of them on the pavement; and while picking them up, his eye caught the signature of *Charles Albert*, written in that very same cipher which had been used by Fossano, and into which our hero had obtained a complete insight at the Spartivento Palace. This was a revelation; for it was evidently that same Charles Albert, King of Sardinia, who had been defeated at the battle of Novara, and who had since abdicated in favour of his son. Our hero had however often heard an opinion expressed to the effect that Charles Albert had privately encouraged the Carbonari and other Secret Societies in the hope of becoming King of all Italy; and De Vere was now tolerably well satisfied that there was good foundation for the rumour. He did not however penetrate any further into the mysteries of those letters: the little he had seen was accidental; and hastily consigning them to the tin box, he replaced them under the stone.

He now continued his researches. A door on the opposite side of the hall led him into another stone passage, where there were two doors on the right side, and a third door at the extremity. The young Count opened the first door, and found that it led into a small apartment which instantaneously reminded him of the guard-room at the Spartivento Palace.

"Doubtless this has served as a guard-room likewise," thought our hero to himself: and then he passed on to the next door.

On opening it, Charles immediately became sensible of a degree of warmth, which did not prevail elsewhere in the subterranean; and casting his looks around, he beheld an iron stove in one corner. Lifting the lid of the furnace, he perceived the smouldering embers: and the source of the heat was no longer a mystery.

"Then some one is here!" he mentally ejaculated: and now he beheld a cloak rolled up on a quantity of dry wood, which no doubt fed the stove, and which might be likewise spread out in such a way as to form, by the adjunct of the cloak a bed to protect the limbs of its occupant from the cold that would otherwise strike up from the pavement-floor.

There was a small cupboard in this room. Charles opened it, and he beheld several addi-

tional evidences of the fact that there was some one residing in the subterranean. There were broken vials—a bundle of herbs—two or three bottles containing water—a few little articles of crockery—and some cooking vessels. There was also a small canister of coffee, and a bottle half filled with spirits.

Wondering who the tenant of the place could be—or whether there were more than one—and having his dagger in readiness to use in case of necessity—De Vere issued from the room, and cautiously opened the door at the extremity of the passage. He now found himself at the foot of an ascent of stone steps; and he at once concluded that this led up towards the suite of Crimson Apartments, at present occupied by the Princess of Spartivento. But where was the individual—or where the persons, if more than one there were—of whose tenancy in that subterranean such ample proofs had been discovered? Was there some place which had hitherto escaped our hero's notice? or had the person or persons issued temporarily forth by means of the secret contrivance of the summer-house?—or, on the other hand, did this stone staircase at the foot of which Charles now stood, lead up to some other room besides the boudoir of the Crimson Apartments? Charles was determined to ascertain the point. He accordingly ascended the steps: all was still; there was no door on either side—no room, no recess where any one could be concealed; and thus he crept noiselessly up until his farther progress was barred by a door at the top of the staircase. He looked for the spring; it was there—and he therefore knew that he had reached the door leading into the boudoir, and that on the other side of the wooden barrier which now opposed him, there was the superb mirror reaching to the floor. From a sense of delicacy towards the Princess, our hero was about to beat an immediate retreat from the vicinage of the boudoir, when certain words which suddenly smote his ears riveted him to the spot.

"And the poison will be of the deadliest kind?"—it was thus that the voice of the Princess herself was speaking. "You are sure that you are not deceiving me?"

"Why should I deceive your Highness?" asked a voice which to the ear of Charles was utterly unknown. "Have you not promised me gold?"

"True!" ejaculated the Princess; "and a disguise to enable you to depart from the awful solitude of that subterranean where for nearly a month past you have been hiding yourself. And now look you! So soon as my object shall have been accomplished—so soon as my vengeance shall have been wreaked—in short, so soon as the deadly venom which you, woman, undertake to provide, shall have done its work, then shall my promise towards yourself be kept! When am I to have this poison?"

"To-morrow, without fail," was the woman's response. "This night will I brew it."

"But have you the means? have you now all the ingredients that you require?" demanded the Princess.

"Last night I stole forth and procured the various herbs that I wanted; and now that your Highness has furnished me with the article that you promised to obtain in the town——"

"Well then," interrupted the Princess, "we thoroughly understand each other. Provide me with the poison that shall give me the vengeance I seek; and when its effect shall have proved to me that you have not deceived me, then shall my word be kept with you. But beware how you trifle with me! You said yesterday that we were in each other's power: you forget how much more you are in my power than I am in yours. For look you! this very day have I read a placard which is posted up in the adjacent town, offering a reward for your discovery——"

"Well, I know that such a placard is issued," interrupted the woman. "I myself told your Highness that there was a reward set upon me."

"Nay, but there is even more than that," interjected the Princess.

"What mean you?" demanded the voice of the woman. "Some fresh placard?"

"It may be one which you have not seen, though it appeared to have been posted for at least several days. It is to the effect that whosoever may harbour you, becomes subject to the same pains and penalties as those whereunto yourself are liable——"

"Oh, is that all?" said the woman's voice. "Every proclamation for the capture of offenders contains a similar warning."

"But still that is not all," pursued the Princess.

"Listen! If any person who has become amenable to the law for any offence save that of murder, shall prove instrumental in handing over La Delfina to justice, such person shall become purged and acquitted of the crime whereof he or she may have been culpable (murder still excepted). Now, woman, do you comprehend how completely you are in my power, and how little I am in yours? If you trifle with me or deceive me, I hand you over to the grasp of justice: and by so doing I have a right to claim full pardon and forgiveness for the part which I took in the invasion of the Tuscan territory. Yes—it is thus that you and I stand towards each other; and if I have explained unto you all these facts, it is simply that there may be no mistake between us, but that you may be fully sensible of what the consequences may be if you in any way trifle with or deceive me."

"And the Minister of Justice has issued such a placard as that!" said the woman in a tone of concentrated bitterness. "Why, 'tis the same as hunting one to death with bloodhounds! I could not have believed it!"

"No matter to you," responded the Princess, "if you serve me faithfully, and thus ensure the means of effecting your escape. Now, in one word, when shall you be prepared to restore unto me that phial which I have given you——"

"This phial which you have given me empty," answered La Delfina, "you shall find upon your dressing-table to-morrow, when you seek this boudoir for your dinner-toilet. It will then be full of a white fluid, a few drops of which poured into the drink of your enemy, will be sufficient. And now I will ask your Highness, when may I hope for the realization of the promises you have made to me? If there be any delay in avenging yourself upon your enemy, whoever that enemy may be, you may try the efficacy of the poison upon a dog—a cat—a rabbit——"

"Enough!" interrupted the Princess. "You

may come to me again at this same hour to-morrow night; and you shall then receive the purse of gold; and the requisite disguise to enable you to accomplish your escape out of the Tuscan territory. And now leave me."

Charles De Vere instantaneously extinguished his lamp, and glided noiselessly down the stone steps. With the utmost caution did he close the door at the bottom of the descent; and all this was effected before the hideous dealer in poisons had emerged from the mirror-concealed door above. Charles groped his way to the room where he had seen the stove and the articles of provender; and there he stationed himself, having closed the door. In a few moments his ear caught the sound of the shutting of the door at the bottom of the staircase; and he now knew that it must have been the noise which had startled him when he was about to destroy the documents in the hall of assemblage. The hag was now approaching; he heard her footstep—a light glimmered through the chinks of the door of the room—then the door itself opened—and the woman appeared with a candle in her hand.

"Not a word! not a cry!" exclaimed our hero, suddenly emerging from behind the door as La Dolcina was entering.

So startled was she that if he had not clutched at the candle it would have fallen from her grasp; but when she beheld a very young and remarkably handsome man, and also perceived by his accent that he was not an Italian, she at once felt convinced that this must be the new Count of Camerino—and she somewhat recovered her presence of mind.

"I know you!" Charles went on to say. "You are the vile poison-vender of Florence."

"And you are the Lord Count of Camerino," replied the woman, "who escaped from amidst the Tuscan soldiery at Leghorn."

"You have about you a phial, and some drug or other article which has just been placed in your hand. Give them up to me!" added the young Count sternly.

La Dolcina now looked frightened, for it naturally struck her that her recent discourse with the Princess must have been overheard.

"Give me those things, I repeat!" exclaimed Charles, with almost a fierce impatience.

"Remember, my lord," said the woman, in a voice which trembled despite all her endeavours to assume a bold look of defiance,—"remember, my lord, we are in each other's power!"

"Silence, wretch! and give me the phial and the drug!" ejaculated the young Count, now stamping his foot impatiently.

With quivering hands La Dolcina produced a little toilet-bottle, and a small packet enveloped in a blue paper, saying at the same time, "If you have heard anything, my lord, you must not judge me too harshly."

"Silence, woman!" interrupted our hero: "speak only when I question you!"

He turned towards the cupboard, and took forth the bundle of herbs which he had previously seen there. Opening the lid of the stove, he threw therein those herbs and that little packet which he had received from the woman: he then broke up some bits of the dry wood; and drawing back the ventilator, he soon beheld the flames rising up in

the stove, the funnel or pipe of which communicated with one of the chimneys of the edifice.

"Now, vile woman," said our hero, "the means for brewing your devilish compounds are destroyed. You will remain here a prisoner, until I shall have made up my mind how to dispose of you."

"Suffer me to depart, my lord!" cried La Dolcina, falling upon her knees; "and I swear that I will not betray you, nor the ladies that are with you!"

"I make no terms with you—and I take my own precautions," said Charles. "Remain here, I repeat. You shall be provided with food."

While thus speaking, he had lighted his lamp; and he had previously noticed that there was a massive bolt outside the door, so that he was not speaking at random when he bade the women remain a prisoner there. She threw herself with a moan upon the heap of wood; and she gave vent to piteous lamentations as Charles withdrew from her presence. But when once the door was closed upon her, she either ceased to abandon herself to useless demonstrations of grief, or else the massiveness of the door itself beat back the sounds of her mingled rage and woe.

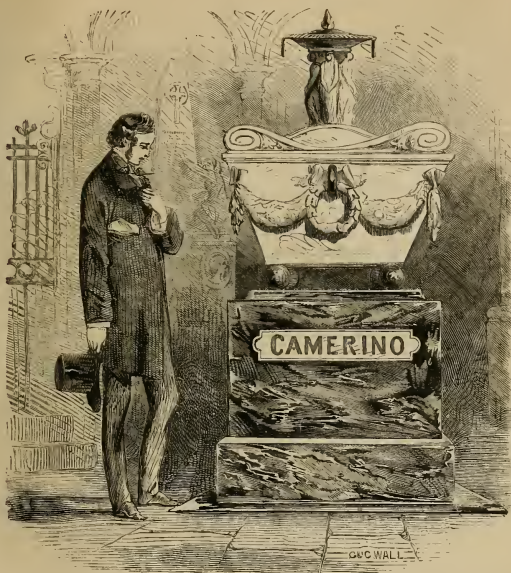
Charles now bent his steps along the corridor, towards the hall of assembly: but scarcely had he opened the door when he was startled on beholding a light in the middle of the apartment, and at the same instant he became aware of the presence of three individuals muffled in cloaks.

"De Vere!" ejaculated one; and it struck our hero that the voice was familiar to him.

But not another moment had he for reflection; for like three tigers springing upon one and the same prey, did the men fly at him—the lamp was dashed from his hand—he was hurled against the wall—and consciousness abandoned him.

As he gradually awoke to his senses, he became aware that he was in utter darkness, and he experienced a pain at the back of his head. Presently, as his recollections began to arrange themselves in his mind, and he felt about for the lamp, his hand encountered the hilt of a dagger, which proved to be sticking through the lapel of his coat. It was not the poniard he had brought with him, for this latter lay by his side. He felt to ascertain if he were wounded by the first-mentioned dagger; but he was not. He now comprehended what had happened. The force with which he had been hurled down, had stunned him: but one of the villains had evidently dealt a blow with the dagger at him, at the same time—and then as he lay motionless and no sound was heard from his lips, it was naturally at once concluded that he had been stabbed to the heart.

Having discovered the lamp, Charles lighted it by means of the materials he had brought with him for the purpose: the globe was smashed—it was otherwise injured—but fortunately all the oil had not run out. Clutching his own long dagger in one hand, and holding the lamp in the other, Charles proceeded to reconnoitre. All was silent. The lantern, candle, or lamp—whatever it were which the three men had with them—was gone; and Charles felt almost convinced that they had departed altogether from the subterranean. A sudden thought struck him. He glanced towards the stone in the centre of the pavement; and a cry of rage escaped him, as he perceived that



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it had been taken out and the tin box was gone!

"Ah, that voice," thought our hero, "which ejaculated my name! Now I remember it! It was Raguso's! They were three of the conspirators! and they knew of the existence of the correspondence in the tin box! They came to fetch it, and have doubtless fled!"

Charles continued his way, but cautiously and warily, towards the stone steps leading up into the summer-house; and he beheld no one. But still he was not completely satisfied that the men had taken their departure. They might have penetrated up into the mansion, where perhaps they would be welcomed by the Princess of Spartivento; for *her* our hero conceived a worse opinion than ever. He resolved to retrace his way through the subterraneans. He did so: he satisfied himself that La Dolina was still in safe custody: he then crept up to the door opening into the boudoir

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—but all was still within. He was now convinced that Raguso and his comrades had really fled; and he again retraced his way towards the summer-house. There he in safety made his egress; and threading his steps through the garden, he ascended the private staircase towards his own chamber. On arriving there, he drank a deep draught of water, for pain had rendered him athirst. He retired to rest; and though he had so much to occupy his thoughts, he nevertheless speedily sank into the arms of slumber.

When he awoke in the morning, there was still a slight—though *very* slight pain at the back of his head; but in no other respect did he experience any evil consequences from the rough usage sustained at the hands of Raguso and his comrades.

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CHAPTER LVIII.

AN ARRIVAL AT THE MANSION.

It may be easily supposed that our hero began to reflect well and deliberately upon the various incidents of the preceding night. That the Princess of Spartivento had purposed to avail herself of the hideous services of La Dolfina for some detestable object, was only too apparent. She needed poison for the purpose of wreaking a deadly vengeance.

"On whom?" asked our hero: and then, as he could not possibly fancy what ideas the Princess had conceived in reference to her sister and himself, he naturally answered his own question by saying, "It is on me that she seeks to be avenged! Yea—I have wounded her pride—I have humiliated the haughty woman—and it is for me that she craves the possession of poison! But heaven has interposed to rescue me from her power, and to save her from committing another crime!"

Then he reflected how he should proceed in the matter,—whether he should at once accuse and upbraid her, and order her to quit his mansion—or whether he should dissemble for awhile that he might make up his mind with more deliberation how he should act. At all events, he was determined to satisfy himself if possible that there was no mistake in his conjecture, and that it was veritably against his own life the vile creature had been plotting.

What was he to do with La Dolfina? Here was another subject for bewilderment. If he handed her over to justice, she would turn round and betray the part which he and the two ladies had taken in the landing at Leghorn. It was true that he himself might procure his own impunity and pardon by claiming the benefit held out by the placard published in reference to the iniquitous woman: it was also true that he had little reason to care for whatever might happen to the Princess of Spartivento:—but then there was the Countess of Milszzo, whom he esteemed and respected, whom he had vowed to love as a friend, and not one single hair of whose head would he allow to be injured! Well then, he came to the conclusion that the affair of La Dolfina must also stand over for the present.

But if the young Count of Camerino were thus on the one hand bewildered by his reflections, on the other hand there were circumstances which also caused him the utmost pain. The instructions left by his deceased benefactor in reference to the contents of the tin box had not been fulfilled. Nor could they be now accomplished:—and what was worse, it was impossible to say for what purpose Raguso and his comrades had taken away the papers, or how an accident might cause publicity to be given to their contents. Charles felt however that he himself was not to be blamed in the matter, for that he had done his best, and he had been frustrated by events over which he could not possibly exercise any control.

When the young Count of Camerino met the ladies and Signor Palmas at the breakfast-table, he found it a hard task to dissemble his sense of loathing and abhorrence towards the Princess of

Spartivento. But as he had made up his mind to become convinced thoroughly of her iniquitous intentions towards himself, ere he tore the mask from her countenance, he strained every nerve to avoid the betrayal of deep execration he now experienced for her character.

The morning repast was scarcely over, when a footman entered the room to inform the young Count that a gentleman wished to see him on particular business: Our hero proceeded to the apartment to which the gentleman had been shown; and though the whiskers and moustache, as well as the tuft upon the chin, had been close shaven, yet Charles at once recognized the countenance of Signor Voitura.

"What! is it possible? you here!" ejaculated Charles, at once proffering his hand; for he had conceived a better opinion of Voitura than of most of the other conspirators.

"Yea—I am come to claim your hospitality," replied Stefano, "until the storm blows over."

"You are welcome," responded Charles. "What tidings of the Marquis?"

"Alas! my noble kinsman was severely wounded," rejoined Voitura: "but he was got safe on board the ship which made good its retreat uninjured by the cannon of the Castle. And so I have to congratulate you on succeeding to the titles and estates of Camerino?"

"Yea: an inheritance which was most unlocked for!" answered our hero. "But tell me, Signor Voitura—how is it that you escaped not in the ship?"

"One of our boats got stranded—but it was fortunately under cover of a friendly Sardinian schooner; and the soldiers who were pursuing us in other boats, lost sight of us. To be brief, we were landed at night-time, farther down the coast; and we made our way into the interior of the country."

"Who were with you in the boat?" inquired Charles.

"Spezzi — Adriano Colletti — Raguso — and another or two."

"Ah, Raguso!"—but the momentary suspicion which arose in our hero's mind, implicating Voitura in the outrage of the preceding night, was instantaneously dispelled by the calm collected expression of frankness which the Italian's features wore. "Did you keep together? or did you separate?"

"Oh, we all dispersed and went different ways," answered Voitura. "I came to this neighbourhood—I heard that the new Count of Camerino had arrived with two ladies—and from the description I received, I felt assured who they must be. Then I resolved upon seeking your lordship's hospitality—which you have granted me."

"Do you happen to be aware," inquired Charles, after a pause, "whether there be any secret place of concealment attached to this mansion—or anywhere in the neighbourhood?"

"I have heard that there is," responded Voitura: "I think Raguso or Spezzi told me so—but I am not certain. At all events I am ignorant of the secret itself."

"I rather think," resumed Charles, after another pause, during which he again reflected whether he should say any more or not, "that I saw Signor Raguso last night——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Voitura. "Has he also sought your hospitality?"

"No:"—and for a moment Charles looked keenly upon Voitura. "No matter!"—and now he went on to say hurriedly, "You may stand in need of refreshment? Come to the breakfast-room, where you will find those ladies to whom you are now alluded. Signor Palmas is, I think, also there."

Stefano Voitura accompanied the young Count of Camerino to the breakfast-room, where his presence caused some surprise. Palmas was grieved on learning how severely wounded was his noble client the Marquis of Ortona: the Princess and Countess asked many anxious questions in reference to the results of the disastrous enterprise. An hour or two passed in a discourse which was thus fraught with a painful degree of interest; and then Charles went forth to ramble in the garden, and to be alone with his own thoughts. Signor Palmas proceeded into the town to see Signor Benvenuto on business; and the Countess di Milezzo presently retired to her own boudoir to think over her love for Charles and to strengthen her mind with the assurance that it had resolved itself into a true Platonic friendship. Signor Voitura remained alone with the Princess of Spartivento.

"How progress matters," asked Stefano, "with the new possessor of the proud title and vast estates of Camerino?"

The Princess looked hard at Voitura, and said, "I had my suspicion from the first that you came hither with some ulterior intent. I am now convinced of it. Speak frankly, Signor Voitura."

"Yes—frankly to your Highness; but in the presence of your sister the Countess I was afraid."

"And why so?" asked the Princess quickly. "Do not hesitate!—tell me candidly what you think and mean."

"Yes," said Voitura, "there must indeed be candour and frankness on the part of those who still adhere to the good cause, desperate though its present prospects may seem to be! Your Highness will not therefore be offended on your sister's behalf if I state that I did entertain some little suspicion that the handsome young Englishman had made some impression on her heart, when she pleaded for him eloquently, and looked at him anxiously at the time he was confronted with Fossano——"

"Well, but you know that I am stanch?" said the Princess.

"Oh, of that there can be no doubt!" ejaculated Voitura with enthusiasm. "I will tell you frankly what has been done. I was here last night with Spezi and Raguso——"

"Here?" said the Princess.

"In the subterranean of the mansion. Does not your Highness know of their existence?"

"Ah! you were here last night?—for what purpose?"

"To obtain possession of a most important correspondence—that correspondence which implicated Charles Albert as a dabbler in Secret Societies and Carbonarism, and which would compel his son Victor Emmanuel to interfere on behalf of any of our friends who might fall into the hands of the Tuscan authorities. For King Victor Emmanuel of Piedmont would do anything to save what he would call his father's honour!"

"I comprehend," said the Princess. "And that correspondence?"

"I knew where it was," replied Voitura: "my kinsman, the Marquis of Ortona had told me. Therefore I came last night with Raguso and Spezi to take possession; and we obtained the conviction that this young Englishman—this new Count—had learnt of the existence of the documents——"

"What reason have you for the opinion?"

"Because the stone beneath which the tin box was concealed, was very recently disturbed; and De Vere himself was in the subterranean."

"What!" ejaculated the Princess: "De Vere in the subterranean?"—and she was almost frightened at the thought.

"Ah! your Highness may well look startled," said Voitura, who was very far from comprehending the cause of Bianca's emotion. "It was the maddest thing that ever the late Count could have done to leave his property and the secrets of his mansion in the keeping of this young Englishman. It was with a traitorous intent to ruin us, and with no genuine fervour, that he shouted for the republic at Leghorn. And now he will as a matter of course prevent the brethren of the Secret Society from any longer making this place the headquarters of the district. But thank heaven! we have got the precious correspondence out of his grasp; or else he would no doubt have given it up sooner or later to the King of Sardinia or to the Tuscan Grand Duke."

"And you say that he was last night in the subterranean?"

"We met him there. He came with a lamp just after we ourselves had entered the hall of conclave: but Raguso flew at him like a tiger and must have stunned him, while Spezi struck at him with his dagger: and to tell your Highness the truth, we thought we had left him for dead. Then it was determined that I should come here early this morning, under some pretence, to confer with your Highness, and secretly to explain what had become of De Vere, whom we took it for granted we had left a corpse in the subterranean. But on reaching the mansion and effecting to inquire for the young Count of Camerino, I was astounded on being quietly informed that his lordship had just finished breakfast, and would see me. He does not appear to have been much injured; and Spezi's dagger must have missed its blow."

"The young Count said nothing upon the subject—at least not in my hearing," observed the Princess in a thoughtful manner. "What could be his motive for this concealment?"

"It is intelligible," answered Voitura. "He most likely obtained his knowledge of the subterranean from some paper found amongst the documents of the deceased Count; and presuming your Highness and your sister to be ignorant on the point, he held it to be a secret which was not to be disclosed. This fact more than anything proves his intention to abolish the rightful uses of the subterranean altogether. In short, he is no friend to Italy—and nothing favourable is to be expected of him."

"Then what would you suggest?" asked the Princess.

"I can suggest nothing," responded Voitura;

"because I am convinced that your sister loves this young Englishman——"

"Ah!" interjected the Princess, her countenance becoming white. "You have indeed hit upon the truth——" and then she abruptly checked herself.

"I understand your Highness!" said Voitura. "You yourself being stanch to the Italian cause, are disgusted and indignant that your sister could possibly be weak and degenerate enough to bestow herself on one who is a traitor to the cause! And therefore you have no longer any love for that self-abasing sister of your's——"

"True! true!" cried the Princess. "But go on, signor: tell me what you mean."

"Your Highness would not hesitate to behold your sister involved in the same ruin which should overtake the young man who perhaps is her lover——perhaps already her paramour——"

"And what ruin is this unto which you allude?" asked the Princess, with much anxiety of manner.

"If the young Englishman were at once delivered up to justice——instantaneously handed over to the Tuscan authorities," resumed Voitura, "he would be summarily disposed of by the hand of the executioner. Your sister, being inculpated with him, would be confined in a fortress for a lengthened period——perhaps for life!——while your Highness would purchase complete forgiveness and pardon at the hands of the Tuscan Government."

"But of what avail,——of what avail, Signor Voitura," demanded the Princess, with a fever of increasing anxiety, "for me to render my own name infamous by surrendering up my sister and that young man, although she be degraded in her love for him, and although he be her paramour?"

"There are several reasons wherefore I urge such a course," answered Signor Voitura. "In the first place your Highness would only be performing a duty towards the Secret Society by bringing down condign punishment upon the heads of those guilty persons, no matter from what source that chastisement may be evoked. For is it not a rule with us to strike by the hand of friend or foe when a blow is to be struck and we have the power to deal it? The next reason I would advance is the fact that your Highness will be assuring your own safety; and in case suspicion should have already fastened itself upon you, or be winding its reptile way towards you, you will all in a moment place yourself high above the necessity of apprehending it. And there is another motive which must be equally well weighed; and that is in connexion with this mansion. In all this part of Italy the subterranean of this edifice furnish the *only* convenient place where the faithful patriots may meet; and if the doors thereof be closed against us, farewell to all our organization——all our discipline——all our modes of secret communication, throughout a territory where it is so highly important for us to gain ground instead of losing it! Therefore the mansion must be got into the possession of some friend. What if this young Englishman were either put to death or condemned to perpetual imprisonment?——his newly-acquired estates would be confiscated by the Government——they would speedily be put up to auction——and the Marquis of Ortona would purchase them. Or if my kinsman could not command sufficient funds for the purpose——"

"Oh, that could be easily managed!" interjected the Princess: "my means could furnish all that would be needful to supply the deficiency on Ortona's part. I must confess, Signor Voitura," continued Bianca, after some little deliberation, "that you have combined a mass of arguments to prove to me the propriety, if not the absolute necessity, of taking a particular step. I will think over it."

"Remember, signora," said Voitura, impressively,—"remember that if you hesitate on your sister's account, you have sworn that the cause of Italian freedom shall be dearer to you than all other loves!"

"I know it—I know it! You need not remind me of this!"——and again the Princess reflected profoundly. "But if I assented to your propositions," she resumed, after a long pause, "how would you counsel me to act? by what means should I surrender my sister and her paramour into the hands of justice?"

"A single line penned in a billet, with your signature, and addressed to the Mayor of the adjacent town, would suffice. Decide at once, Princess! I will become the bearer of the note; and then I will hasten away and carry the intelligence of all that has happened to my kinsman the Marquis of Ortona, who will applaud the action on your part."

"No, signor—not now! not now!" replied the Princess hurriedly. "It is something to be reflected upon. But, Ah! you yourself——"

"Oh, signora! how you wrong me!" ejaculated Stefano, at once comprehending what the Princess was about to say. "Do you think that I would do aught which should compromise you?——you who are so stanch, so firm in the good cause. Heaven forbid! I would sooner face the gibbet or dare the dungeon, than think of assuring my own safety by a deed so foul!"

"Forgive me, signor——forgive me," said the Princess, extending her hand, which the young man took and pressed with mingled respectfulness and admiration to his lips. "In a few hours I will give you my decision. Meanwhile you will remain here; and despite the violence you may do to your feelings, you must nevertheless dissemble towards the young Englishman."

The Princess now withdrew from the apartment where this colloquy had taken place; and she repaired to her boudoir. There, throwing herself upon a sofa, she gave way to her reflections.

She had been led on by Voitura's discourse to listen to his proposal and the arguments by which he had backed it, just in the same way as all persons wish to attain an insight into any circumstances that may by any possibility be associated with their own concerns. And there was also a certain presentient feeling in her soul that if her own projects should not be carried to a successful issue, other channels were being suggestively opened unto which she might be glad to have recourse. For if she might not have love, she would at least have vengeance!——and therefore everything that she had heard from Voitura's lips became of importance amidst the topics of this bad woman's thoughts.

"And so Charles visited the subterranean last night?" she presently said to herself. "But assuredly he did not discover La Dolfina? If so, there

would have been an arrest—a disturbance!—he would certainly have captured her at any risk and peril to himself; for never, with his high notions of propriety and honour, would he have allowed her to remain concealed beneath his roof! And he would have spoken of the circumstance; for *that* would have been something that he would not have considered himself bound to hide. Or he would have secretly consulted Palmas—they would have been closeted together! But nothing of all this has happened; and therefore La Dolcina is still safe in her hiding-place. Besides, 'tis evident from what Voitura said, that Charles went only to the subterranean to assure himself that the private correspondence was safely concealed there; and doubtless on regaining his senses after that blow that he received, he was only too glad to hasten back to his own apartment. But Ah! why should I not descend into the subterranean and ascertain for myself, beyond mere conjecture, that La Dolcina is safe, and that she is progressing well with the task that she has taken in hand?"

Yet though the Princess mentally put this question to herself, she did not move from the sofa:—on the contrary, she felt her soul recoiling from the bare idea of seeking that detestable woman amidst the deep silence and awful gloom of the vaults beneath the mansion. The daring courage of Bianca dissolved at the thought of finding herself face to face with that wretch who dealt with such a hideous skill in subtle poisons. The Princess might have faced a lion if need had been: but she could not bring herself to penetrate voluntarily into a morass where a venomous reptile was gliding. Though prepared in the depths of her own soul to commit the darkest crimes, yet Bianca shuddered at the image of the woman whom she had invoked to assist her in that pathway of turpitude.

"No!" she said to herself; "I will not go! Who can tell what such a fiend-like creature may do to me? Besides, it is but a matter of a few hours, and I shall know whether I have anything to look for in that quarter or not. What were her words? That when I seek my boudoir for the dinner-toilet, I shall find the phial upon the table. Well and good! If it be there, all will have gone well with her: but if it be *not* there, it will then be time enough for me to ascertain what has become of her."

Such were the reflections of the Princess of Spartivento with regard to La Dolcina; and then, as the impassioned woman pressed her hands to her throbbing brows, she mentally apostrophized her young hero in terms that were fully consistent with the agitated condition of her feelings.

"Oh, beautiful youth! why were we ever destined to meet? Why were you so suddenly thrown into my path?—was it to be unto me a source of happiness or misery? What may I now expect? Oh, this love of mine! how fierce and yet how tender!—how strong is it in itself, and yet what a weakness is it! O Charles! shall I ever clasp thee in these arms? will thy head ever be pillowed upon this breast? will thy lips ever meet mine? Dare I hope to inspire thee with one scintillation of that mighty flame of passion which burns and rages with volcanic fury in the depths of my own bosom? or art thou too deeply enamoured of Lucia? No, no! it is impossible that you can prefer the sentimental Lucia to my impassioned

self! It is but the delusion of the moment under which thou art labouring! At all events let me think that I can yet bring thee to love me. Without that hope I should die!—without that idea I should swallow the poison which I intend for *another*!"

Then the Princess—closing her eyes, and placing her hands over them, as if hermetically to seal them in such a way that she might shut out all external objects—abandoned herself to delicious and luxurious thoughts,—giving full scope to her imagination, and buoying up her fancy with the idea that every obstacle had been set aside and that she was now happy in the possession of the young Englishman's love.

But suddenly an idea struck her; and starting up from the sofa, with a dead pallor upon her countenance, she ejaculated, "Good heavens! what will he think when he beholds her whom he now loves falling dead at his feet? Will he believe that it was apoplexy? or will he suspect foul play? No—it is impossible that he can suppose me capable of such a crime! Impossible! And I will tell him that it is in consequence of all the excitement through which my poor sister has recently passed—and I will shed torrents of tears —Oh, I will dissemble! And then, to be alone beneath this roof with Charles—without a rival—in full freedom to practise all a woman's wiles and bloodsheds towards him—Oh! is it possible that I can fail? Must I not succeed? must I not conquer? and must not he succumb? Am I not grandly handsome? If the image of my sister cannot be banished from his memory by the actual presence of such a face and form as these"—and she was now contemplating herself in the mirror—"then may it be said that never yet was there a veritable spell in woman's beauty! Oh, yes! I shall succeed!—I shall succeed! But if not?—Ah! then life will have nothing to induce me to cling to it!—the whole world will become a waste to my contemplation—and death shall release me from my miseries! And not alone to the silent grave will I go! No!—for if he will not be mine, he shall not live to become another's!"

Such a terrible expression swept over her countenance as she came to this resolve, that she was absolutely frightened at her own looks; and she abruptly turned away from the mirror which reflected them. Then she threw herself again upon the sofa; and it was in the following channel that her thoughts next flowed:—

"How is it that I have become thus changed—and all in a few days? To think that I whose virtue was so strong that my very look overawed the libertine—to think that I who was never wont to harbour an impure thought—should now be ready—aye, and madly yearn to throw myself into the arms of this young man! To think that I who was so proud of my unblemished reputation, and who would sooner have perished than descend from the pedestal of purity even to win the favour of a King, should now be willing to become the mistress—aye, the slave of this English youth! Can love do all this? has love that power? Oh, where are all the oaths that I have sworn on behalf of the cause of Italian freedom?—oaths that over and over again I have repeated in the presence of the effigy of my perished husband? Where are they? Scattered to the winds!—and all by the potent wand of love! Oh, who shall talk of

the might of Emperors and the power of Kings—of the strength of armies upon the land or of navies upon the sea—when viewed in comparison with the might, the power, and the strength of love? For, Oh! we are not the willing votaries but the victims of that deity!—Ah! what would I give to rend the chains which are now upon me!—to throw off the influences which have fastened themselves upon me! No! it is impossible! This love of mine may ever cling to me as a curse fatal as Dejanira's poisoned garment—and I the while powerless to put it away from me! But let me not despond! No, no! I must indulge in wild burning hope!—or else—or else there were indeed naught left to live for!—and 'tis hope only that now beckons me onward in my stupendous pathway of crime!”

The reader may now be enabled to judge through what varying phases of feeling the Princess was rapidly borne,—how at one time she was floating onward on the sunny waters of the paradise which her own imagination created—and how at another moment she was plunged deep down into the vortex of a volcano where fires were fiercely raging,—how she strove to reason herself against remorse and buoy herself up with hope—how she had her eyes open to the horrors of the career which she was pursuing, yet sought to blind herself against them—and how her fancy at one time revelled in an elysium delicious and luxurious beyond description—and how at another it depicted horrors than which pandemonium itself had nothing more frightful!

At length the Princess endeavoured to fly away from thought itself; and moreover she did not choose to remain too long separated from her sister, for fear lest she should be furnishing an opportunity for Lucia to enjoy the society of the young Count. The Princess accordingly descended into the garden, where however she did not find *De Vere* at all—but Lucia in conversation with *Voitura* and *Palmas*; the last-mentioned individual having just returned from his visit to *Signor Benvenuto*.

The time passed on until the dinner hour was approaching; and then the Princess of *Spartivento* returned to her boudoir. It was in a state of the most anxious suspense that she entered the room; and with a still greater tension of the feelings did she advance towards the toilet-table. Then all in a moment the most powerful revulsion took place, as if the entire mechanism of life took a new movement within her, when on the toilet-table she beheld the phial.

Yes—it was there. She took it up: it was very nearly filled to the stopper with a fluid completely colourless and pellucid like water.

“The woman has kept her word!” said the Princess, with a feeling of indescribable triumph; and having locked up the phial in a bureau, for fear lest by any accident it might be broken, she rang the bell to summon the handmaidens who were appointed to attend upon her.

When her toilet was completed, she dismissed them: she concealed the phial about her person; and she descended to the drawing-room. Her sister *Lucia* was already there; and *Charles* was showing her a beautiful book of prints which he had that afternoon discovered in the library of his mansion. He was making some remark upon one

of the pictures, and *Lucia* was gazing up at him with that look of modest friendly familiarity which she was now accustomed to assume towards him when they were alone together. It was just such a look as a sister might bend upon a brother; but to the distorted fancy of the Princess it instantaneously assumed another appearance. She thought it was a look of fondest love which her sister and the young Count were exchanging, and that all the tenderest intelligence was flashing in warm transfusion betwixt the eyes of both. For a moment *Bianca* bit her lips with rage: but this evidence of what she felt passed unnoticed alike by *Charles* and *Lucia*. *Palmas* and *Voitura* almost immediately afterwards made their appearance in the drawing-room: and the conversation became general until a circumstance occurred which suddenly startled the whole party.

This was nothing else than the appearance of half-a-dozen cavalry soldiers, with an officer a little way in advance, approaching up the shady avenue leading towards the mansion.

“All is lost!” murmured the Countess of *Milazzo*, with a voice and look of terror: but it was towards our hero that her eyes were turned, thereby involuntarily showing that it was only for him she was smitten with apprehension.

The Princess and *Voitura* exchanged rapid regards—the former full of rage at the looks of her sister—but *Stefano* meaning to convey a regret that his proposal of the morning was now anticipated by the arrival of the officers of justice.

“All need not be lost,” *Signor Palmas* hastened to observe. “Many reasons may bring these soldiers to the house besides the intention of arresting anybody.”

“And if an arrest were contemplated,” our hero hastened to add, “those men would scarcely show themselves thus in front of the house, thereby giving us warning and time for flight; but they would have advanced, separately and stealthily, to surround us.”

“Put a bold face upon it, my lord,” said *Signor Palmas*, “and go and see what they want. Or shall I?”

“Not so, my dear friend,” responded *Charles*. “I will follow your advice—I will go out to them myself.”

The young Count accordingly quitted the room; and descending the staircase, he reached the marble steps of the front-door just as the officer and his little troop rode up to the entrance.

“Have I the honour of speaking to the Count of *Camerino*?” inquired the officer, carrying his hand to his cap with a military salute.

Charles bowed an affirmative.

“I thought you must be his lordship,” pursued the Lieutenant; “for I heard in the neighbourhood enough to prepare me to behold precisely such a personage as I have now the honour to address.”

“And what may be your business, signor?” inquired *Charles*, who scarcely knew whether he had more to hope or fear; and yet he was perhaps more inclined towards the favourable view of the matter.

“Your lordship has doubtless heard of a certain treasonable and piratical attempt made by a horde of desperadoes upon the city of *Leghorn*?”

“Yes—I have heard something of the matter;”

replied our hero, maintaining the utmost composure of countenance.

"Well, my lord," resumed the officer—"But, by the bye, I ought to ask your lordship's pardon for detaining you out here in the cold air—"

"Not at all. You have doubtless a duty to perform," said the young Count. "Proceed."

"My explanations shall soon be given," continued the lieutenant. "It is said that two Piedmontese ladies of rank—a Princess and a Countess—were actually and positively engaged in that affair: it is even believed that they fought, disguised in male apparel—that they escaped, though it is not known how—for all the information which has been obtained is very vague indeed upon the point—"

"So it would appear, signor," said our hero, with a smile of good-natured affability.

"You are right, my lord: and therefore you see how meagre the instructions are upon which I am acting. However, to be brief, it is supposed that the two ladies I speak of have come somewhere into this part of the country—and of course the authorities will arrest them if they can catch hold of them."

"And what, then, do you require of me, signor?" asked our hero.

"Simply, my lord, that you will give the assurance that the two ladies who I understand arrived on a visit to your mansion the day before yesterday, early in the morning, are not those of whom I am in search. Indeed, it is a mere matter of form, my lord—"

"Of course—I understand it in that light," interjected Charles, with a smile. "And thus, as you have anticipated my answer, perhaps you will alight and partake of some refreshments?"

"I thank your lordship. A glass of wine here at the entrance, and a dram for each of my men—but we have not time to dismount—we must ride on into the town and make our report to the Mayor."

"You shall have refreshments immediately!" exclaimed our hero: and summoning a lacquey, he gave the necessary orders. "Have you received any description of the personal appearance of the two ladies?" he proceeded to ask, again addressing himself to the officer.

"No, my lord—only that they are supposed to be very handsome. But then so many of the sex answer to this description—God bless their hearts! that it is as vague as if a person was told to go out and catch an animal with a tail—and inasmuch as there are very few animals without tails, it would be difficult to know which particular species was meant. But touching and concerning these ladies of yours, my lord, you have not yet given me the formal pledge I require, and which as an honourable man you will of course consider as binding as an oath."

"Here are the refreshments!" interjected Charles, who for a few minutes had vainly buoyed himself up with the hope that the business was quite set at rest—whereas he now found it reopened, and a pointed demand made for a formal and direct answer.

He busied himself to do the honours of the well-laden tray which the footman had brought out, and another lacquey was employed in distributing the glasses and handing cakes.

"Your wine is excellent, my lord," said the officer, as he began sipping a second glass. "What with youth, and good looks, a noble title, a splendid mansion, and such a cellar as this wine is a specimen of, you have everything to make life happy. And now my lord, with thanks for your kindness, we will take our departure."

"Good evening to you, lieutenant," said our hero. "I am sorry you cannot remain to drink a bottle of this wine since you relish it. But good evening."

"Good evening, my lord—Ah, I forgot! Your lordship's assurance, on your sacred word of honour as a gentleman, that those ladies—"

"My cousins," interjected Charles.

"Ah, your lordship's cousins? Oh, well, if that's the case, then, I'm sure we need not look here any further for a Sardinian Princess and Countess. Your lordship is an Englishman—and of course your cousins are English also. And now once more good evening, my lord."

With these words, and again bestowing a military salute upon the young nobleman, the lieutenant wheeled round his steed and trotted away at the head of his troop; while our hero ascended hastily towards the drawing-room, delighted to think that he had settled the business so comfortably, by the mere accidental interjection of the words "my cousins," and without being compelled to have recourse to a falsehood.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE PHIAL.

THE young Count related everything that had passed between himself and the officer; and the fine eyes of Lucia di Milezzo sparkled with joy when she learnt how completely all suspicion had been averted from our hero himself. The Princess perceived that look; and again did the reptile of jealousy lift up its head in her heart.

"But now," exclaimed Lucia, "it is our bounden duty, my dear sister, to leave this house with the least possible delay! It is clear enough that at present no idea exists that his lordship the Count could have had any concern in the enterprise against Leghorn: but if we remain here—"

"At all events we will not discuss the subject now," interrupted Charles, with a smile. "Her Highness and your ladyship are safe beneath my roof."

"To be sure!" exclaimed Signor Palma; "all the more safe on account of this very visit which has just been paid! The officer will go and make such a report in the town as shall render the idea ridiculous that the Sardinian Princess and Countess could be harboured within these walls. And so permit me, my dear signora," proceeded the worthy old gentleman, now specially addressing himself to the Countess di Milezzo, "to implore you to guard against any sudden excitement—that is to say, as much as you possibly can—by maintaining a continuous control over your feelings. I saw just now how deadly pale you turned when the officer and his troop came in sight—then

how full of apprehension you were while my Lord Count was absent from the room—then how feverish was the suspense which you displayed on his return——”

“And natural enough, signor!” interrupted our hero; for Lucia had just averted her crimsoning cheek; and he comprehended why—he knew how much she had felt on his account.

The Princess and Signor Voitura exchanged significant glances,—the latter hastily whispering, “Your sister’s love for the Count is an infatuation—a madness!”

Bianca felt a fierce rage glowing though her entire form; and it seemed to her for a moment as if her veins ran with lightning: then the next instant she became all cold, and a gloisal sensation struck her as she thought within herself, “I have the means of vengeance!” for the phial of poison was about her person.

“It is all very well, my lord,” proceeded Palmes, who was inclined to be garrulous, “to say that it is natural to give way to these paroxysms of strong excitement: but I tell you that they are to be guarded against just the same as a prudent person would avoid inebriation. Of course I need not tell an enlightened audience, such as I have now about me, that sudden emotions are most dangerous, morally and physically. They may destroy the reason—or they may cut short the existence. I hope, signore, you will bear all these facts in mind.”

“Surely, my dear signor,” said De Vere, “you might choose a more cheerful topic?”

“It at least has the merit of being an interesting one,” replied the Princess of Spartivento with a smile that seemed full of amiability; for she rather liked the turn which the notary was giving to the conversation.

“I have a brother who is a physician,” proceeded the notary, who was terribly apt to work a particular topic into complete exhaustion, and who was self-willed and obstinate in sticking to a favourite subject. “He has written a book upon the nerves, and he gives many singular incidents and illustrations of his special theories. They are well authenticated. Some happened of his own knowledge, and beneath his own eyes. I will tell you a case.”

“Pray for heaven’s sake,” interposed Charles, “think of some other topic!”

“I shall not detain you many minutes, my lord,” said the notary.

“Why don’t they announce dinner?” muttered Charles to himself.

“My brother, the physician,” resumed Signor Palmes, “relates the tale I am about to tell you. There was a young lady at Palermo, and she was engaged to be married to a very handsome young gentleman of independent property. He was well known for his liberal opinions, and had more than once incurred the risk of being thrown into prison. At length his name was mentioned in a somewhat serious manner, in connexion with one of the numerous conspiracies which are constantly hatching or exploding in Sicily: but rumour had exaggerated the real facts of the case as they regarded the hero of my story; for he had ample evidence to prove that he was not at a particular place at the time when it was alleged he was there with the chief conspirators. His intended bride

had heard the rumour in its worst form; and she was full of terror and suspense. Her lover flew to comfort, console, and reassure her; and you may conceive how great was her delight when she found that he was in no way seriously implicated. My brother the physician called at the time; and he read the lady a long lecture upon the folly and danger of abandoning herself to the impulse of every emotion and allowing any suddenly excited feeling to gain such a potent ascendancy over her. She promised to be more guarded and courageous for the future: but while she was still speaking, a troop of soldiers rode up to the house—just as that little party came to this mansion ere now. The poor young lady, forgetting all her wise resolutions, jumped at the most evil conclusion—namely, that the worst was going to happen, and that the soldiers had come to arrest her lover. They asked for him: he went down stairs to speak to them; and during his temporary absence the young lady was a prey to as terrible a suspense and inward agitation as your ladyship was just now:—and here Signor Palmes addressed himself to the Countess di Milazzo.

“Have you nearly done, signor?” inquired Charles impatiently; and then he again muttered to himself, “Why in heaven’s name is the butler so long in announcing dinner?”

“My story is almost ended,” said Palmes, who was as good-natured as he was garrulous. “Let me see? where was I? Oh, I recollect! Well, the soldiers came not with the slightest intention of molesting the young gentleman. Two officers who were friends of his, were in command of the troop; and they called to let him know that he had better go and give certain explanations to the military commandant—in which case all would be well; but that on the other hand, if he neglected to do so, an order for his arrest might be issued. Well, the soldiers rode away; and the young gentleman hastened up-stairs to reassure his intended bride—just as you, my lord, came hurrying in ere now. Not however that the cases are quite parallel——”

“Surely dinner must be ready?” ejaculated the young Count impatiently.

“Ten words and I have finished!” said Palmes. “The young lady seemed to have quite recovered from the shock she had experienced and the excitement that followed: her lover went to the commandant, made everything right with that functionary, and then returned to the house of his intended bride. Several guests were present, when they all sat down to dinner. Now comes the tragical catastrophe.”

“Indeed?” said the Princess, who had been listening with a growing interest in the narrative. “Was the sequel a calamitous one?”

“Dinner must be served up!” ejaculated Charles.

“Three words and I have done!” said Palmes. “An hour had elapsed—perhaps two hours indeed, from the departure of the soldiers—the intended bride was seated at table with her lover and her friends—they were at dessert—when all of a sudden, just after the young lady had raised a glass to her lips, she fell from her seat—a corpse! Excitement had killed her.”

“How strange! how remarkable!” ejaculated the Princess: and indeed she inwardly felt the



full force of the words she had just uttered, though her real meaning was not understood.

"Not so very remarkable either," said Palmas, "for my brother gives at least a dozen illustrations of the fact that sudden death arising from excitement, may take place two or three hours after the exciting cause itself has passed away."

"Indeed!" said the Princess, "I was not until now aware——"

The door was thrown open; and the butler made his appearance upon the threshold to announce that dinner was served up. The party descended to the dining-room, where an elegant banquet appeared upon the table. Our hero seemed to take upon himself the task of maintaining the conversation; for he talked more than he was wont to do; but it was really for the purpose of preventing the notary from reverting to his favourite topic. Never did the young Count seem

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more affable or agreeable; and according to the rule of conduct which he had prescribed for himself, he directed his discourse as much to the Princess as to the Countess—though it was impossible for him to avoid showing every now and then that he had a preference for Lucia over her sister Bianca. And all the time that he was thus gaily conversing, he was wondering whether the Princess had the phial about her, and whether she meant to make a trial of its contents on the present occasion.

As for the Princess herself, she kept on mentally ejaculating, "Good heavens! how strange that Palmas should have told such a tale! what a remarkable coincidence! how extraordinary that in his garrulity he should be brought as it were to aid the success of my own plan, or at least to screen me from suspicion! If we had been in connivance he could not have devised a narrative

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more admirably suited to my purpose, nor have told it in a more appropriate manner!"

The dinner progressed; there were several courses following each other—and then came the dessert. The hothouses of the garden produced the most delicious fruits in that December season; and there were several likewise which still grew in the open air that had disappeared months back from the colder latitudes of more northerly climes. There was likewise a varied assortment of wines, chosen by the good taste of the butler, who had long been in the service of the late Count, and who was now well pleased to do all possible honour to the present one. The conversation progressed with gaiety: it seemed as if Charles had infused an hilarious spirit into it. As for the Princess, she had never appeared more cheerful, and her manner seemed more than ever kind and affectionate towards her sister.

Charles never once lost sight of the Princess, although she was very far from noticing or suspecting that he thus watched her. But he followed every movement, every gesture on her part. At length, while Signor Voitura was relating some anecdote that riveted the attention of the Countess and the notary—and while Charles himself affected to be equally interested in the tale—the Princess of Spartivento dexterously drew forth the little phial from the laced bodice of her dress. Quick as lightning was the glance which she darted round the table at the moment: but no one seemed to be observing her. She sat next to her sister: Lucia's wine-glass was about three parts filled; and the Princess, while affecting to lean a little more across the table with an air as if she were loath to lose a single word spoken by Stefano Voitura, poured some half-dozen drops from the phial into that glass. Charles saw it all: but the Princess fancied that he beheld naught of the proceeding.

And now what an interval of stupendous suspense ensued for Bianca, during the three or four minutes that Voitura's tale still lasted ere it reached its conclusion. Three or four minutes!—they seemed to be three or four ages! In how long a time would Bianca see her sister fall dead at her feet? were not her very minutes now numbered? would she live five or ten? and then what would ensue? Terrible was the agitation which reigned within the guilty woman's soul: but externally she was calm, collected, and with all her attention apparently absorbed in the tale which Voitura was telling.

At length the anecdote was finished; and Signor Palmas, while making some remark, took up his glass—a movement which was mechanically followed by Lucia. And now how violently beat Bianca's heart! Lucia slowly emptied her glass, and replaced it upon the table. But the expected catastrophe did not ensue. There was no falling from the chair—no corpse rolling at Bianca's feet: her sister was apparently as full of life and health as she was before she had partaken of the contents of the little phial. What did it mean? had La Dolcina deceived her? or was the poison slower in its operation than she had been led to believe? As she swept her looks round the table, she fancied that she caught the eyes of the young Count of Camerino fixed upon her—her countenance became scarlet—but when she looked at

him again, he was gazing in another direction, and with an air as if he had nothing unusual in his thoughts.

Half-an-hour passed, and the contents of the phial remained without effect. The party now rose from their seats, and ascended to the drawing-room, where coffee was served. Presently Palmas engaged Lucia and Voitura in listening to some laughable anecdote which he had to tell them, and to which the Countess readily gave her attention, inasmuch as it was very different from the gloomy tale he had told before dinner. The opportunity for which Charles had been seeking now presented itself; and he said to the Princess, "Will your Highness take a turn with me in the picture gallery?"

"Willingly, my lord," answered Bianca, amazed at the proposal, but not terrified by it: on the contrary, there was a fluttering pleasure mingled with her wonderment as she asked herself, "Can he possibly have changed towards me?"

They quitted the drawing-room—traversed a landing—and entered the picture gallery. There the Princess was just beginning to make some remark in an affable and even tender tone, when out hero, turning round upon her with startling abruptness, and assuming an ominous sternness of look, said, "Signora, I have saved you from the commission of a crime!"

The Princess was stricken ghastly and speechless.

"Yes—I repeat my words," continued Charles. "You found the phial upon your toilet-table—but it contained water! Your Highness may with all possible impunity swallow the remainder of its contents."

"My God!"—and Bianca could say no more: she was as white as a corpse—but she was trembling as if she were smitten with the palsy.

"You see that you are unmarked," continued Charles; "but it is not my intention to expose you in the presence of your sister and the two gentlemen who are now with her. I would spare the Countess of Milezzo the anguish and the shame of knowing that her sister would have become an assassin but for the wondrous intervention of providence which placed me in a condition to frustrate the intended crime. But your Highness must depart from my dwelling!"

"Yes, yes—I will depart! Oh, for God's sake do not expose me! I will leave your house at once!"

"Not so, Signora," interrupted our hero: "that would be to excite some suspicion. Remain here until to-morrow morning, and I promise you that no look nor word on my part shall seem to upbraid you for any secret cause. The crime which you committed at your palace at Turin, has hardened you for the perpetration of other deeds of turpitude; and I cannot forget that it was on my account that you committed that first crime. For this reason I spare you now! More I need not say—unless it be to enjoin that you do naught to excite in my mind a suspicion that you are bent on further mischief: for if so, it will be my duty to place your sister on her guard against you."

"My lord, you are merciful," murmured the Princess, with a tone and look of the deepest contrition—the most abject humiliation; "and I

thank you. Leave me, I beseech you—leave me here for a little while!”

Charles bowed coldly, and quitted the picture gallery. Then, all in a moment, a singular change came over the Princess of Spartivento: a vivid crimson mantled upon her cheeks—her eyes flashed fire—and her whole countenance indicated a degree of rage and hate and vindictive fury that would even have armed the head of Medusa with more horrid terrors.

“Ah!” she ejaculated: “am I now odious in his eyes? and is he for ever lost to me? He would send me away—and he would keep his paramour Lucia! No—it shall not be.”

She glanced around: there were writing materials on a side table—she penned a hasty note—she sealed and addressed it. Scarcely was this done, when Stefano Voitura entered the picture-gallery.

“Ah! ’tis fortunate!” he said. “I feared that the evening would pass without affording us a moment to be alone together. Has your Highness reflected well?”

“I have!”—and Voitura was struck with the strangeness of her manner as she thus answered him.

“And your decision, signora?”

“It is here!”—and she handed him the billet.

“I know that your Highness was stanch and firm to the good cause!” said Voitura, his whole countenance kindling with enthusiasm as he pressed to his lips the hand from which he received the billet. “In less than an hour everything shall have been done!”

Voitura returned into the drawing-room, where he remained for two or three minutes; and then he said, as if quite in a casual manner, that he would go and smoke a cigar in the garden. Charles was talking to Palmes and Lucia. Voitura left the apartment; and presently the Princess re-entered it. She seated herself at the table on which the volume of prints lay, and affected to study them with great interest. The old notary was telling another long story, to which Lucia gave her attention out of courtesy, and to which Charles pretended to listen as an excuse for not going near the Princess. Time passed on,—when all of a sudden a scream pealed from Lucia’s lips as she beheld a cavalry officer make his appearance on the threshold of the open portals.

The officer entered the room, closely followed by half-a-dozen soldiers.

“Ah! my lord,” he at once exclaimed, “it was your turn to win the game this afternoon: it is my turn now. Yet I am sorry for it—for you were hospitable and generous—and I am devilishly grieved to have to take you into custody for high treason against the Grand Duke.”

“My God!” moaned Lucia, clasping her hands together.

“You did not expect me, my lord,” proceeded the lieutenant. “I managed the thing well: I did not allow your servants time to raise an alarm. May I ask which is the Princess of Spartivento?”

“I,” said Bianca, at once stepping forward.

“Then your Highness is ensured pardon and impunity for having given the information——”

“No, no! it is impossible!” shrieked Lucia, in accents of wildest despair. “My sister to have done this!”

“Yes—!” said the Princess; “and I am proud of it. You and your paramour——”

“Bianca, you dare not say it!” exclaimed Lucia, all of a sudden drawing herself up proudly—that is to say, with the pride of conscious innocence—and flinging her indignant looks upon her sister. “The Count of Camerino’s love is given to an amiable young lady in England——”

“The Signora Agnes Evelyn,” interposed Palmes. “That I know; for my Lord Count has told me so.”

The Princess now looked aghast; and she was seized with the horrible idea that after all she had made some frightful mistake, and that Lucia was not the object of the young-Count’s love. But the lieutenant now stepped forward; and addressing Lucia, he said, “I suppose that your ladyship is the Countess of Milezzo?—and therefore you also are my prisoner.”

“Ah! is it thus?” ejaculated Charles, as a sudden thought struck him: and then quickly turning towards Lucia, he said in a hurried whisper, “Do what I am about to tell you, I conjure you! Do not think of me!—rest assured that I can save myself! Or at all events you must be at freedom to save me!”

“Speak, speak!—what is it?” demanded the Countess with feverish excitement, but also in a whisper.

“Proclaim that you know where La Dolfina is—say that she is concealed in the subterraneans of this house—and offer to give her into custody! Then may you demand your own pardon and forgiveness! Quick, quick!—hesitate not!”

“My lord,” said the lieutenant, “I am sorry to be uncourtously hasty or rudely pressing—but time is slipping away—you and the Countess must come with me——”

“Oh, my God! What have I done? what have I done?” cried the wretched Princess of Spartivento, sinking upon a seat and covering her face with her hands.

“Signor,” said Lucia, addressing herself to the lieutenant, “I will surrender up a criminal into your hands——”

“A criminal! Who?” and the Princess gave a quick convulsive start, as if suddenly galvanized.

“I mean La Dolfina—the poisoner—the branded woman of Florence!” exclaimed Lucia.

“Ah!”—and again the Princess sank, terror-stricken and overwhelmed, on the chair, murmuring, “Then they doubtless know everything!”

“If you can fulfil your promise, signora,” said the lieutenant to the Countess, “you will be performing an immense service to the State—aye, and to society in general.”

“And I myself shall be held free and acquitted of all offence, attain, or misdeed in respect to the Tuscan Government—is it not so?” asked Lucia.

“By the Saints, that would be the effect of the proceeding!” exclaimed the officer, who looked as if he were by no means sorry that so charming a lady as the Countess di Milezzo should thus be enabled to save herself.

“Take a couple of your men, signor,” continued Lucia, “—go into the subterraneans—and there you will find the poison-vender of Florence.”

“But how to reach the subterraneans?” inquired the lieutenant.

"Princess," said our hero, turning with a cold severe look towards Bianca, who was all pale and trembling, "you will permit this officer with a tremble of his men to penetrate into your boudoir?"—then, without waiting for a reply, Charles whispered a few hurried words of instruction in the ear of the lieutenant.

This functionary issued from the apartment, accompanied by two of his soldiers; and as the door closed behind them the Princess threw herself at the feet of Charles and her sister, exclaiming in the wildest tone of passionate entreaty, "Pardon! pardon!"

Our hero turned away in cold disdain for a moment from the woman whom he knew to be so profoundly steeped in crime: but the next instant recollecting that it was on his account that her first deed of turpitude was perpetrated, he bent a look of pity upon her, and said, "I forgive you, even though it be my life that you are now taking! But depart, and let me see your face no more!"

By this time several of the domestics had made their way to the apartment, and were testifying by unmistakable signs their deep sorrow at the calamity which had overtaken the young master whom they already loved although they knew so little of him. Charles beckoned Fiorello to advance: and he said, "Let this lady be supplied with any means of conveyance which she may prefer from this place."

The Princess, overwhelmed with grief and humiliation, burst into tears when she received that assurance of forgiveness from the lips of the generous-hearted Charles; and rising up from her suppliant posture, she threw herself into the arms of her sister, murmuring, "O Lucia! can you also forgive me?—is it possible that you can repeat the magnanimous words which have issued from his mouth?"

"Yes, unhappy sister—I can forgive you, because *he* has pardoned you," replied Lucia, adown whose pale cheeks the tears were also streaming. "You have injured me with your suspicions—injured him likewise. It is true that I love him," continued the Countess, in a voice that was audible only to the ears of Charles: "and in a moment of mingled error and infatuation I avowed my love: but he told me that his heart was devoted to another! Then I promised to think of him only as a friend—and he bestowed the kiss of friendship upon me."

"Oh, how fearfully have I been blinded!" moaned the wretched Princess, who had just received the explanation of the scene which she beheld in the garden. "Pity me, Lucia! I am half mad! But I must leave you!—not another moment ought I to tarry beneath this roof! But you will remain with him, dear Lucia? I am not jealous nor envious now! My God! I am fully cured of those morbid and distorted passions! You will be unto him as a friend—as a sister! Farewell, Lucia."

With these words the Princess of Spartivento rushed from the drawing-room; and Signor Palmas approaching the Countess di Milezzo, said, "Ales, signora, your unhappy sister has worked no small degree of mischief here!"

But Lucia was sobbing and weeping too bitterly to be enabled to give any answer; and in a

few minutes the lieutenant came hurrying back to the apartment, exclaiming, "It is all right! La Dolcina is in custody!"

"And the Countess di Milezzo, who gave the information, is therefore free?" said our hero.

"Yes," replied the lieutenant. "I will take it upon myself to say, that her ladyship may proceed whithersoever she thinks fit; and I will presently make a suitable report to the proper authorities."

"And whither am I to be removed?" inquired Charles.

"To Sienna, my lord," was the response. "And with your consent we will set off with the least possible delay. What means of conveyance have you at the mansion?"

"There are several equipages," answered our hero.

"Good, my lord," pursued the lieutenant. "Then perhaps you will give the requisite instructions to have them got in readiness; and you would oblige me if you could so manage that I might take that wretched woman La Dolcina with us as far as Sienna, whence no doubt she will be removed to Florence to take her trial."

Our hero quickly gave the necessary orders; and a travelling carriage as well as a smaller vehicle were soon in readiness.

"I shall accompany your lordship," said Signor Palmas. "I may be of some service to you."

"And I also," added Lucia: then, glancing towards the worthy notary, she said, while a modest blush flitted across her cheeks, "Under your paternal protection, Signor Palmas, I may travel without the chance of provoking the tongue of scandal to whisper aught against my good name."

"The tongue of scandal will never dare," said the notary, "to speak ill of one who is thus considerate for her own reputation."

The young Count of Camerino, the Countess di Milezzo, Signor Palmas, and the lieutenant took their seats inside the travelling carriage: the officer preferred this mode of accomplishing the journey, and with the permission of Charles he left his horse in the stables of the mansion. La Dolcina was placed in the other vehicle; and the soldiers rode by the side of both.

The two equipages went away; and a few minutes afterwards a third was driven round to the front of the mansion. Then the Princess of Spartivento—who had concealed herself amidst the evergreens at a short distance—came forth from her hiding-place, and took her seat in the carriage that was prepared for her. The domestics were barely civil to her; and they showed by their demeanour the detestation they felt for her conduct in giving information against their young master.

"Where is the carriage to be driven, signora?" inquired the footman who had just closed the door of the vehicle.

"Whither do they purpose to take his lordship?" asked the Princess.

"To Sienna?" was the curt reply.

"Then I also will go to Sienna," she rejoined; and as she threw herself back in the carriage, she murmured, "Who can tell but that I may yet be enabled to undo some of the tremendous mischief that I have done? At all events, if *he* should die, I swear that I will not survive him: but I will im-

melate myself on the very spot where his innocent blood is shed!"

CHAPTER LX.

THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when the several equipages rolled away from the front of the Camerino mansion; and it was about one o'clock in the morning when they entered the city of Sienna. We will follow the Princess of Spartivento, who arrived some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour after the other persons; and she gave such orders that her chaise pursued not the same route through the streets as the equipage which bore Charles and her sister had taken. She alighted at an hotel, and at once proceeded to the chamber that was prepared for her. Sleep did not however visit the unhappy woman's eyes for a long time after she lay down: but she eventually obtained an hour or two of repose—yet troubled and agitated was it.

She quitted her chamber between eight and nine o'clock in the morning, and was proceeding to the sitting-room where her breakfast was served up, when on the stairs she encountered Stefano Voitura. Her first impulse was to level a bitter reproach at the man who had instigated her to practise the horrible perfidy against De Vere: but a second thought suddenly struck her, and she received Voitura with apparent kindness.

"I presume you have heard all that happened?" she said to him, when by her invitation he had followed her into the sitting-room.

"No—I have heard nothing," answered Voitura,—"only that if the new-fangled Count were taken prisoner, he would be brought to Sienna. This I was told last night in the town of Camerino when I delivered the billet which your Highness penned."

"And what brings you to Sienna?" inquired the Princess.

"To watch the proceedings—and because I judged that your Highness also would come, inasmuch as you may be needed as a witness. Therefore Raguso and Spezzi are likewise with me here, to be upon the spot to consult with your ladyship upon what is next to be done—and also——"

"And also what?" asked the Princess.

"And also to see if your Highness can inform us of some secure place wherein we may conceal the box containing the correspondence which so seriously implicates the late King of Piedmont."

"That correspondence which you found in the subterranean of the Camerino mansion?"

"The same, my lady. You may be enabled to tell us whether it will be safe for us to restore the box to that hiding-place—I mean after the young Englishman shall have been executed——"

"The authorities are aware of the existence of that subterranean," said the Princess. "The young Count surrendered up the infamous Florentine prisoner, La Dolcina, who had concealed herself there. But you have something more to learn. It is that my sister has emancipated herself from the meshes of the law. The Count is a prisoner, and is at Sienna: but my sister——"

"What! her ladyship is free?" ejaculated Voitura, in astonishment. "And yet your Highness gave information about both?"

"Do you happen to have read," inquired the Princess, "any of the large placards which have been everywhere posted in reference to La Dolcina?"

"Yes, signora. I recollect being struck by the singularity of one of the inducements held out for any person who might think fit, and who might have the power, to betray her into custody,—that such person should be forgiven all past offences against the law, of whatsoever kind, with the single exception of murder."

"And now you understand," said the Princess, "how it occurred that my sister was enabled to save herself. She happened to know that La Dolcina was concealed in the subterranean——"

"The Count, her paramour, must have told her?"

"Ah, Signor Voitura!" interjected the Princess, "we have committed a most fatal mistake—and you behold before you the most wretched of women——"

"Good heavens! what means your Highness?" exclaimed Stefano, in amazement.

"I mean," pursued Bianca, "that we misjudged the young Count and my sister. It is naught but the purest friendship which subsisted between them. Of this I have acquired the certitude beyond the possibility of doubt. And Oh! may we not have judged De Vere hastily and harshly?—may we not have misinterpreted his motives in shouting for the republic at Leghorn?"

"If I thought that I had wronged this young man," said Voitura, "I should never know another minute's happiness in my life!"

"And we have wronged him!" cried the Princess vehemently. "Oh, believe me, he is the most generous-hearted of men! It would be a history too long—and likewise too humiliating for myself——"

"Princess!" ejaculated Voitura, "tell me, I adjure you—are you conscious of having done any wrong towards that Englishman? Could you, when I was misjudging him, have said ought to remove the prejudice from my mind? Could you, when I insisted that it was needful to our own interest to remove him from our path,—could you have shown reasons why he ought to be allowed to live? In a word——"

"In a word," repeated the Princess, with a look full of anguish and contrition; "I have acted a shameful part, Voitura—and I implore you, in the name of justice and mercy, to help and mitigate the foul injury which we have jointly done!"

"Signora," said Stefano, "I am a man of the sternest and most inflexible justice. I would have sacrificed De Vere without remorse when I thought that his death would be advantageous to the sacred cause of Italian freedom: but if I have been in error, I will now lay down my own life, if needful, to prevent a single hair of his head from being injured!"

"Oh, I know that this was your disposition!" exclaimed the Princess fervently: "and it was for this reason that I have been telling you all these things! Let it suffice for you to know, signor, that if the young Englishman shall perish, his innocent blood will be upon your head and upon mine! What can be done to save him?"

"My God! what?" exclaimed Voitura. "But I will go and see how matters progress—I will make inquiries. In a short time I will return to your Highness. Ah! by the bye, I ought to mention that Raguso and Spezzi are also beneath this roof; and as we all bear feigned names here, your Highness must be cautious if on happening to meet them——"

"I shall not leave this room until your return," interrupted Bianca. "It will be better not. Depart, signor!—learn what you can, and come back!"

Voitura hurried away. He was not more than half-an-hour absent; but this interval appeared to be a perfect age to the Princess. All her former firmness and self-possession appeared to have abandoned her. She was full of anxiety and agitation, as well as under the influence of an acute and poignant nervousness. The course of events in a few short days had achieved a wondrous alteration in respect to the Princess.

Signor Voitura returned; and it was in a state of breathless suspense that Bianca demanded, "What news? But Ah! I need not ask you! I see by your countenance that the very worst is to be apprehended!"

"The very worst!" responded Voitura gloomily. "The hours of the unfortunate young Englishman are assuredly numbered!"

The Princess gave vent to a half subdued shriek; and she clasped her hands with an ineffable anguish: then exercising some sudden power of control over herself, she asked in a quick hoarse voice, "What have you learnt?"

"The Tuscan Government has acted with the most extraordinary rapidity," replied Voitura, "in all the proceedings which it is now taking. It has issued summary orders to every military commandant, to try by court-martial all persons who may be denounced as belonging to the late corps of invasion; and capital punishment is to follow within twenty-four hours after conviction. These mandates are, I repeat, peremptory; and no regard is to be paid to the rank of any persons who may be brought before the military tribunals. Now your Highness knows the worst!"

"But how will they be enabled to convict the young Count?" ejaculated the Princess, catching at the first straw of hope which seemed to be floating past her. "There will be no evidence——"

"Rely not on such a slender reed as that," interrupted Voitura. "Depend upon it, sufficient evidence will be produced!"

"When is the trial to take place?" asked Bianca, with impatience.

"It is now commencing," answered Voitura, looking at his watch.

"Where?" demanded the Princess.

"At the Town Hall. General Germini, the military commandant at Sienna, is a man of a severe and stern disposition—cruel and overbearing—and by no means scrupulous in straining a point or two with a view to effect a particular purpose. I think it better to tell your Highness all this to prevent you from misleading yourself with any vainly conceived hope. Alas! in plain terms it is my conviction that the doom of the young Englishman is sealed!"

The Princess covered her face with her hands

for a few moments, and sobbed audibly: then hastily wiping away her tears, she ejaculated, "I will go and do all I can to save him!"

The scene now shifts to a room in the Town Hall at Sienna. There, at the head of a table, sat General Germini, in his full uniform; and before him was his cocked hat with green plumes. He was nearly seventy years of age; and he carried in his countenance a complete corroboration of the description which Voitura had given of his character. On his right sat a Colonel, a Major, and two Captains, belonging to the regiments stationed at Sienna. On his left hand was his military secretary; and next to him sat two officers of the General's Staff.

At the opposite end of the table—which was a long one—stood our young hero, in the custody of the lieutenant and two of the soldiers who had brought him from his mansion during the past night. His countenance was pale, but firm and collected: its expression showed the natural dauntlessness of his disposition. Yet there was nothing of bravado in his looks,—only a manly dignity, the result of conscious innocence. A little apart sat an elderly gentleman and a veiled lady. These were Signor Palmas and the Countess di Milezzo. Near the door stood some half-dozen persons, who were more or less officially connected with the proceedings: but the military tribunal was not considered to be an open court; and thus the public generally were not admitted. A great crowd had however collected in front of the Town Hall; for rumour had quickly spread how no less a personage than a Count was about to be placed on his trial; and it was reported likewise that he was an Englishman—how he was young and exceedingly handsome—and how there had been many romantic circumstances connected with his accession to the Camerino title and estates. No wonder, therefore, that the present proceedings should be producing the greatest excitement, and that such crowds should have collected, and be still increasing in the neighbourhood of the Town Hall.

"I see by the *procès-verbal* which is placed before me," began General Germini, thus opening the investigation, "that the prisoner bears the title of the Count of Camerino, and that he is accused of having taken a part in the invasion of his Royal Highness's city of Leghorn, in the morning of the 30th of November. How say you, my Lord Count, do you plead guilty to the accusation?"

"Permit me to give your Excellency a few explanations," said our hero, in a firm tone.

"I only want a plain and direct answer to the question which I have put," responded Germini. "The accusation charges you, my lord, with having been amongst the persons who some four or five days back made a landing at the city of Leghorn. Do you plead guilty to the charge?"

"It is a question which I cannot answer with a simple *yes* or *no*," rejoined our hero. "I must explain——"

"No—you cannot at this stage of the proceedings, be permitted to make a speech. You must first of all answer the question. Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"It is true that I was with the invaders," said Charles; "but——"

"Enough! enough!" cried the General. "What

qualification can you offer for such an avowal? I do not even know that it is necessary to waste any more time upon the proceedings——"

"I beseech your Excellency to hear what this lady has to say," interposed Signor Palmas, now standing forward.

"And pray who is the lady?" demanded General Germini. "Is she a witness in the case? If so, she has of course a right to speak. But who is she, I repeat?"

"I am the Countess of Milazzo," said Lucia, throwing back the veil which had hitherto concealed her countenance—so beautiful, but Oh! so pale!

"The Countess of Milazzo?" exclaimed General Germini. "Why, surely that name is familiar to me in a way but little creditable to your ladyship?"

"Yes—I at once admit to your Excellency," said the Countess, "that I was amongst the conspirators; and therefore no one can better explain how much the Count of Camerino was concerned in those proceedings——"

"But how is it that your ladyship is at large?" demanded Germini, in a stern voice.

Here the military secretary whispered a few words to the General, and placed a paper before him. Then the lieutenant who had taken Charles into custody, was beckoned to the head of the table; and he conversed in a low tone with the General for a few minutes.

"Oh, now I understand!" said Germini, at length speaking aloud. "The Countess di Milazzo saved herself by seizing upon a particular opportunity. And pray, signora, what evidence have you to give against the prisoner? I am glad to see that you are disposed to demonstrate a sense of gratitude towards the government of his Royal Highness, the Grand Duke, for the signal favour which under circumstances you have been enabled to secure unto yourself——"

"Your Excellency is mistaken," said Lucia, advancing towards the table with a firm but modest demeanour. "I am not about to give evidence against the prisoner, but entirely in his favour. I am about to show that——"

"Stop, signora—stop, if you please!" interrupted General Germini, waving his hand in a peremptory manner: then having whispered for a few instants with the officers who sat on his right hand, he went on to observe, "The tribunal is entirely of opinion that you cannot be heard as a witness in this case. You acknowledge yourself to have been an accomplice—you are only saved by an accident from standing by the prisoner's side; and therefore it would be monstrous to let your ladyship come forward as a partisan witness——"

"But in the name of justice," cried Lucia, joining her hands entreatingly, "I implore and beseech your Excellency——"

"Silence, signora! If you compel me to speak with greater sternness," continued Germini, "than I could wish to adopt towards one of your sex—particularly one of your rank—it will be your own fault. You are an accomplice, and cannot be heard. It would be quite different if your sister the Princess, who gave the information, were to make her appearance as a witness. We should hear her at once."

The door was at the moment opening: a veiled lady entered—and she said, "The Princess is here."

Charles started for a moment: then he resumed his look of calm dignity. The Countess of Milazzo gazed at her sister with the acutest suspense; and the good-hearted Palmas trembled with the same feeling.

"Where is the Princess?" inquired General Germini.

"I am the Princess of Spartivento!"—and the veil was thrown back from Bianca's countenance. "I am she who gave the information which made the Count of Camerino a prisoner."

The Princess advanced towards the table: but she did not for a moment settle her looks upon our hero. With a single glance she had on the first instance embraced the entire scene; and then her regards were riveted only on the General. She was as pale as marble: but those who had never seen her before, were struck with that handsome countenance, as they had previously been with the more delicate loveliness of Lucia's face.

"I come to tell your Excellency," said the Princess, "that this young nobleman"—and she pointed to De Vere without looking at him—"entered not of his own accord into the band of conspirators——"

"With all this we have nothing to do," interrupted General Germini.

"On the contrary," exclaimed the Princess, "you have everything to do with it! The prisoner was not a willing agent——"

"If your Highness has naught more to tell us," again interrupted the General, "than to speak in extenuation of the captive, it is a mere waste of words and time. It is sufficient for us to know that he was amongst the conspirators. We do not care to investigate how he came to be of the number."

"But if utterly against his will he were drawn into the affair," exclaimed Bianca, in a vehement and impassioned tone,—"if all he did can be proved to have been under sternest compulsion—it would be monstrous—Oh! it would be monstrous to a degree for you to doom that young man to death on such grounds! No, no! you could not do it! There is justice in Italy! there is mercy even in a military tribunal! Remember, it is a human life that is at stake! Ye are men—ye are not monsters! The prisoner was no willing traitor to an Italian Prince. Listen—I beseech you, listen! I implore you to hear me while I tell you how the young Englishman came amongst us!"

The Princess had continued speaking with such an exceeding vehemence that General Germini had vainly attempted to interrupt her. But now, as for a moment she paused through absolute want of breath, he raised his voice and said in a peremptory manner, "I will hear no more! all this is irrelevant! Your Highness must comprehend that if you persist in taking up our time, we shall be compelled to order the ushers to remove you. You and your sister ought to be glad to think that you yourselves have escaped condign punishment, and not come hither to interfere with the solemn march of justice."

Bianca staggered back towards a seat, and sunk

on it like one annihilated. The military secretary now placed a document before General Germini; and this personage, after having looked over it, said, "I have under my eyes a report of the whole proceedings at Leghorn. It is drawn up by the Colonel who commanded the ducal troops on the occasion. From this report it appears that amongst the conspirators there was one who raising his voice, cried on behalf of an Italian Republic. From other information which is herein given," added the General, pointing to the report, "I am led to believe that it was *your* voice, prisoner, which raised that most treasonable, villainous, and obnoxious cry."

Charles De Vere remained silent: he of course would not inculpate himself—but on the other hand he would not give utterance to a falsehood.

"Very well," continued the General; "I take it for granted that it was your tongue which gave utterance to that shout. I am not at all astonished to find men of different shades of opinion embarked in the same cause, when all those opinions are alike treasonable and detestable. It is thus that desperadoes of different aims band together for a common object—though each one hopes that the result will be to bring his own particular views uppermost. But enough of comment! I think, prisoner, it can scarcely be needful for me to call upon you for your defence: for you can have none to offer in the face of the established fact that you were amongst the horde of desperate adventurers who landed at Leghorn."

"And yet, your Excellency," said De Vere, "I will exercise my right, if this be the opportunity, to make a few observations. Had you permitted either of these ladies to continue the explanations on which they entered—"

"But you saw that we could not," interrupted the General.

"Then I must embody them in my own defence," resumed Charles.

"But that is a line of defence," again interrupted the General, "which you cannot be permitted to pursue."

"Then is it not a mockery," exclaimed Charles, with an indignant flush upon his countenance, "to call upon me for a defence at all?"

"If you choose to adopt such terms, my lord," said the General, "I cannot prevent you: but your own good sense ought to teach you that you are insulting this tribunal."

"Far be it from me," interposed our hero, "to treat any assemblage of gentlemen with insult: but as I perceive that my doom is already sealed, perhaps you will permit me, as a man standing face to face with death, to say a few last words on his own behalf. It is not that for a moment I suppose whatsoever I may now say will alter the sentence you are about to pronounce upon me. But I would have it go forth to the world that I did not join those men willingly in their attack upon Leghorn. I could not nite in the cry of the Solidarity of Italy, because it meant the perpetuation of monarchical Government: therefore, when I found myself perforce necessitated to take a part in that enterprise, I entered a protest against its object, at the same time that I gave vent to the freedom of my own sincere opinion, by declaring for the Republic. I found myself in front of an array of soldiery; and not merely

by way of putting myself right with the world in case of whatsoever might happen, but likewise as a last desperate resource to retrieve the fortunes of the party with whom I had perforce become embarked, I raised the cry which I thought would put the hearts of those Tuscan soldiers to the test and take the only step which could possibly save a cause that otherwise was lost. I failed: and then I was led by a variety of circumstances to a mansion which I found to be my own, and to the assumption of a title which I little expected ever to be in store for me. It was then my purpose to swear allegiance to the Grand Duke's Government as speedily as possible. Not through fear!—not through cowardice!—but because I had become a Tuscan subject, and I held myself bound to recognise the powers which exist in this State. That such were my intentions, this worthy gentleman"—and Charles pointed to Signor Palmas—"can attest."

"I do," said the notary, in a solemn tone.

Hitherto the young Count of Camerino had gone on speaking in a strain which so riveted the attention of his audience, that not even General Germini himself had dared to interrupt it. But now the charm was broken; and that stern warrior said in a harsh tone, "Your lordship has been already allowed a far greater license than I could ever have thought of permitting. You have stolen upon us as it were; and here must be an end of it."

"Nevertheless," the Colonel who formed a member of the tribunal, ventured to suggest, "as it is a dying man who is speaking, let him in the name of heaven say anything more, if aught more remain to be said!"

The General looked fierce and threatening: but perceiving by the countenances of the other members of the tribunal that they shared in the sympathy just expressed by the Colonel, he thought it more prudent to let the prisoner continue.

"And now," said Charles, "I have but little to add to the words which I have already spoken. Young as I am, I have already looked death too often in the face to be daunted by his presence now. At the same time, hovering as I am upon the brink of one world and upon the verge of another—the one known, and the other unknown—I feel a religious awe, but not a coward dread. I have nothing wherewith to reproach myself: but being so young to die—Oh, so young!—I have an immensity of cause for regret. The time must come when it will be proved that I have been a victim, and not a criminal. I presume, sir, that between the passing of the sentence and the execution of it, I shall be allowed a little leisure to write a few letters containing my final adieu—" here his voice faltered for a moment, and then instantaneously became firm again, as he repeated, "my final adieu to those whom I love?"

"The sentence which I am about to pronounce," answered General Germini, "will not be executed until daybreak."

The young Count bowed. It was a relief for one in his desperate position, doubtless though he were, to find that he had yet so many hours to live.

"And now, your Excellency," he added, "I have finished."

The Countess of Milazzo was weeping bit-



terly: but at this instant one of the ushers who were placed near the door, advanced on tiptoe towards the Princess of Spartivento, and placed a little billet in her hand.

"Who gave you this?" she inquired in a whisper.

"It was brought by a man who looked like the porter at an hotel, and who instantly departed."

The usher then glided back to the door; and Bianca, opening the billet, ran her eyes over its contents. She immediately thrust the note into her bosom, rose from her seat, and drew down her veil; and as she quitted the room she passed close by the prisoner, whispering a few hasty words as she went by. He started for an instant; but the next moment regained his composure—and then the door closed behind the Princess, who spoke not another word to a soul, and flung not another look upon any one—no, not even upon her sister.

While this little incident was occurring, the

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General was consulting the other members of the military tribunal. They spoke in a subdued tone; and their conference was brief.

"The sentence of this court," said Germini, with a more solemn tone and with a more judicial demeanour than he had yet adopted, "is that you, Count of Camerino, having been convicted of high treason against his Royal Highness the Grand Duke of Tuscany, be condemned to death. And it is therefore decreed that you suffer the pain and penalty due for your crime by being shot to-morrow morning at daybreak."

An awful silence followed. Charles stood for a moment as if he himself could scarcely believe that it was all true, or that it was otherwise than a dream fraught with fearful dismay and consternation; but suddenly awaking as it were to a conviction of the astounding truth, he bowed with dignified coldness to the tribunal—turned—and was led away by the sentinels from the room.

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The Countess of Milazao rose abruptly, as if galvanised, from her seat; and she made one pace forward as if to follow Charles from the apartment: but suddenly clasping her hands together, she reeled right round and sank senseless in the arms of Signor Palmas.

CHAPTER LXI.

SIR RODERICK DALHAM.

THE circumstances of our tale now compel us to return to England. Nearly a month had elapsed since the decision of the memorable lawsuit—that decision which produced two deaths, killing the successful plaintiff with joy and the unsuccessful defendant with grief! We need not recapitulate how old Mr. Barrington and Sir John Dalham died both at the same time—and how by the death of the former without a will, the whole property which had been the subject of so much litigation became the heritage of Gustavus Barrington.

Sir Roderick Dalham possessed the empty title of a Baronet without the slightest means of supporting the real dignity of his position. Winifred was Lady Dalham; but her husband was a pauper. Yet they were not without the elements of happiness. Roderick, though double his wife's age, doted upon her; while she, deeply sensible of all the many kindnesses she had received at the hands of him who had made her his bride, loved him in return with an affection as deep, as sincere, and as abiding as if her heart had never for a single moment experienced a tender sentiment for her cousin Gustavus. The reader may have fancied at some earlier periods of this narrative, that there was some little degree of selfishness in the desire of Roderick Dalham to make Winifred his wife, and that he might have calculated upon thereby securing the litigated property for himself eventually in case of the lawsuit turning out unsuccessful in reference to his father. No doubt that Roderick had always reckoned on Winifred's becoming her grandfather's heiress in case the old man should have anything to leave: but this calculation was indeed very far from being the prime motive which had induced him to persevere in seeking her as a wife. No!—but he did really love her with a deep affection and earnest attachment; and therefore now that she was left portionless and poor, without a single chilling of inheritances from her grandsire, his demeanour changed not in the slightest degree towards her—unless it were to become more affectionate and to demonstrate a more faithful devotion than ever!

Previous to his father's death, Roderick Dalham had not been enabled to live altogether with his wife—though he had passed with her as much of his time as he could possibly bestow without the danger of exciting any suspicion on the part of his sire. But when Sir John Dalham died, and Roderick on succeeding to the title found himself to be homeless and portionless, he of course proceeded to take up his residence altogether with Winifred. She occupied a neat little cottage in Kentish Town; and this humble habitation now became Sir Roderick's home. We should here repeat that which we have before stated—namely, that Sir Roderick

took care to ascertain with the least possible delay where Gustavus Barrington was at the time, and to adopt prompt measures to communicate with him in Italy so that he might be informed of the death of his grandsire and of his own right and title to the immense property which had been the subject of the lawsuit.

The period had now arrived when Winifred was to become a mother; and it was on the very day when the military tribunal at Sienna condemned the young Count of Camerino to death—namely, on the 4th of December, 1819—that an heir was born to the Baronetcy of Dalham. Conceive the father's pride and the mother's joy when their marriage was thus blessed by the infant which now engrossed almost all their thoughts! They forgot that they were poor—they forgot that the title to which an heir was born was but the veriest mockery without the means of supporting it! It was sufficient for them that they possessed a pledge of their mutual love; and they felt as if heaven were again smiling radiantly upon them.

It was in the evening of that same day in the morning of which the child was born, and Sir Roderick was seated alone in the little parlour at the humble dwelling in Kentish Town. Worthy Mrs. Slater was paying a visit to the young mother, in whose bosom the babe was nestling; and we should not omit to add that Agnes Evelyn had likewise called on Lady Dalham during the day. But our present business now lies in the little parlour, where we find Sir Roderick seated alone. A fire was blazing in the grate—the candles were lighted upon the table—the newspaper which he had been reading, was laid aside—and he was giving way to his reflections, when there was a double knock at the front door. The servant answered the summons; and entering the parlour, she announced Mrs. Barrington.

Sir Roderick started up from his chair, and turned to greet the lady who was thus ushered into the room. They had met before: so that he would have known who the quadron was even though her name had not been mentioned:—but she stopped short as her eyes fell upon his countenance: she remembered that she must have seen him before, but she recollected not how nor where.

"Mrs. Barrington," he said, taking the quadron's hand, "you do not remember me. It is precisely a year since I had the pleasure of rendering you some little service, as you were alighting from a vehicle at the door of a West End hotel—"

"True!" ejaculated Emily, as she now at once recognised the tall good-looking personage who had saved her from being robbed by the idle street-boys. "Little did I expect to meet in Sir Roderick Dalham a gentleman to whom I was already so deeply indebted."

"The service was a mere trifle," said the Baronet. "However, the recollection of our former meeting will help to throw down the barriers of cold formality on the present occasion. We ought at once to be on good terms—we ought to be friends—there is a species of relationship between us, for my wife is the cousin of your husband—"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed the quadron, in a tone that seemed full of the most genuine fervour: "let us be friends! But I fear, by the very way in which you yourself made the overture, that you

have heard things against me—there have been points in my conduct in reference to Gustavus—and—Winifred—some time ago—which have been mentioned to you—”

“I have ceased to think of them,” interrupted Sir Roderick. “Besides, rest assured that my dear Winifred never dwelt more than was necessary upon unpleasant subjects.”

“I know that she is all goodness!” said the quadroom softly. “Where is she?”

“Let me hasten in the first place to inquire,” interjected Sir Roderick, “concerning Gustavus? Is he well? or why have you come alone?”

“You will see him shortly,” rejoined Emily.

“But I came first of all—and alone—because—”

“But,” she suddenly interrupted herself, “it is no unpleasant subject!” and she smiled with an air of peculiar satisfaction, revealing her beautiful white teeth, while a sunny light appeared to play in the depths of her magnificent black eyes. “I will explain everything presently. Meanwhile let me again inquire concerning Winifred?”

Dalham explained that his wife had that day rendered him the father of a beautiful boy. The quadroom grasped his hand, proffering her fervid congratulations; and she exclaimed in all the most enthusiastic accents of her musical voice, “Oh, how I long to felicitate Winifred herself, and to kiss the dear babe!”

Sir Roderick was as much enchanted as surprised by the friendly and even affectionate conduct of the quadroom towards himself and those who were so dear to him; and he said, “I will at once ascend to Winifred’s chamber and tell her that you are here. She will be glad to welcome you—”

“No—not yet! not yet!” interrupted Emily. “Let me first explain the motive for which I have come, and then you shall announce my presence to dear Winifred.”

“I am sorry, my dear Mrs. Barrington, that so humble a place as this—”

“Call me Emily,” said the quadroom, “as I mean to call you Roderick. Did you not just now observe that we are kinsfolk? Oh, I mean that there shall be happiness and friendship and good-fellowship for the future! There is much,” she added, with a profound sigh, “in reference to the past which I could desire to be altogether undone—or at least forgotten—”

“Rest assured, my dear Emily,” answered Roderick, “that since you come in this friendly temper unto us, and with so many kind words, Winifred will receive you with open arms. Nothing will give her greater pleasure than to welcome you as a cousin—aye, and to love you even as a sister!”

“I know not to what extent you may have heard, Roderick, of how at one time I ill-treated and insulted her who is your wife,” resumed Emily, with a look and tone of the deepest contrition; “but you will presently be enabled to judge whether I am heartily penitent for the past, and whether I be not anxious to make atonement by means of substantial deeds as well as by mere words.”

“I believe—I believe you, Emily!” exclaimed Dalham: “yes—I believe you without any farther corroboration! But I was just now on the point of remarking that I am sorry I cannot welcome

you to a more luxurious and comfortable abode. Nevertheless, if you are come to stay with us—which I sincerely hope is the case—”

“No, Roderick: my visit is a fleeting one,” interrupted Emily; and again she heaved a profound sigh. “I am going to Jamaica.”

“To Jamaica?” echoed Dalham. “Let me hope that Mr. Pinnock is in no danger. I heard the other day from Mr. Millard, when I went to inquire where a letter would find your husband, that Mr. Pinnock’s health was failing—”

“My father is dead,” said the quadroom in a low tone; and then she raised her kerchief to her eyes.

“Dead!” repeated Dalham. “Oh, Emily, I sympathize with you! I regret that I should have elicited the announcement so abruptly from your lips!”

“And now you understand,” she resumed, “wherefore I am going to Jamaica.”

“Does Gustavus accompany you? But of course he will! I was foolish to ask such a question!”

“On the contrary,” interrupted the quadroom, “Gustavus will not accompany me. Neither is it to look after my deceased father’s affairs that I am going to Kingston. No!—for everything was so considerably and judiciously arranged by him when upon his death-bed, that all his fortune and estates at once became mine. I have this day learnt from Mr. Millard the fullest particulars on this head. But I am going to Jamaica—first of all because I feel that it is my duty to go and drop a tear over the resting-place of him who was ever so kind and good to me, and by whose couch I ought to have been in his last illness; and in the second place, I am going to Jamaica,” continued the quadroom, in a voice that was broken with sobs, “because—because—I may no longer remain in Europe—because alas! I have given mortal offence to Gustavus—and—and—everything is at an end between him and me!”

“Good heaven!” ejaculated Dalham, shocked by this intelligence: “is it possible that my ears are not deceiving me? But yet you loved him so well—”

“Ah—too well! too well!” murmured the quadroom: and now covering her face with her hands, she sobbed deeply. “Yes—it was because I *did* love him too well—Oh! I cannot recapitulate!” she interrupted herself, with a sudden and passionate vehemence. “You can well believe that all this has not arisen through any infidelity or wanton wickedness on my part!”

“But console yourself, my dear Emily! console yourself!” said Dalham. “All is perhaps not so bad as you think. Let me and Winifred become mediators betwixt Gustavus and yourself! Rest assured that we shall be enabled to bring about a reconciliation! Gustavus knows how much you love him—”

“But he says that my love has become a tyranny—that its exigencies constitute a monstrous despotism—”

“Ah, ’tis a fault on the right side!” interjected the Baronet; “and henceforth there must be mutual concessions. Do not despair, Emily!”

“A thousand, thousand thanks, dear Roderick,” interrupted the quadroom, “for this kind language which flows from your lips; but I dare not buoy

myself up with any hope which it might possibly be calculated to engender. No, no! things have gone too far! I have behaved badly—very, very badly! I confess it!—and God knows how anxious I am to make an atonement!—Look you, Roderick, I feel that my conduct has been so reprehensible, that if I were a Catholic I would go and shut myself up in a convent for the rest of my days. Indeed, I have almost done with life! I feel like one who is making expiations and atonements to accomplish a last peace alike with man and God, so that there may be meet preparation to encounter Death whenever he shall make his appearance!”

“Emily, Emily, this is language most painful for me to hear!” exclaimed the Baronet. “Surely, surely, things cannot be so desperate as all this?”

“When you see Gustavus,” responded the quadroom, with an air of profound mournfulness, “you will find that I am only speaking too truly!”

“And where is Gustavus?” inquired Dalham.

“I left him in Florence twelve days ago. We then parted—yes, and it was with the mutual understanding that he was to come to England, while I was to take the earliest opportunity of embarking for the West India. It was my original intention to take ship at Havre, in France. But during my journey thither I reflected upon many things—I felt that I had a certain duty to perform—and I am now *here* to accomplish it.”

“Here?” ejaculated Dalham. “Ah, my dear Emily, if you mean that you had excusa to make or forgiveness to receive for anything that is past, rest assured that neither Winifred nor myself entertain aught but the kindest feelings towards you! Yes—and now Winifred will also share with me the deep sentiment of sympathy wherewith your unfortunate narrative has inspired my soul!”

“I have yet to explain the duty which has brought me hither,” resumed Emily. “Listen, and interrupt me not. Gustavus is rich: his grandaïre’s death has suddenly made him wealthy and rendered him totally independent of my resources. He is fond of pleasure and somewhat addicted to extravagance—though heaven knows I say not this as a matter of blame or reproach, but simply to prove to you the truth of the statement I am about to make,—which is, that the fortune Gustavus has acquired by his grandfather’s death will not be too large for his own uses. Therefore—Nay, do not interrupt me! I beseech you to bear me to the end!—Therefore,” proceeded the quadroom, “it has become my paramount duty to take care of you and Winifred. You are impoverished—but I know full well that it would have been otherwise if old Mr. Barrington had not died intestate. Had he made a will he would have left Winifred his heiress. Of this there can be no doubt!”

“Such a consideration has never entered our thoughts,” exclaimed Dalham,—“at least not in a manner to render us jealous of your husband’s prosperity. No, Emily—no! Believe me—”

“Not another word, Roderick!” interrupted the quadroom. “I long ago knew Winifred’s generous heart, though perhaps I have not always been able to appreciate its excellence. And in respect to yourself, I understand you likewise—yes, even

from this brief half-hour’s discourse! But listen to what I have to say. The whole of my fortune, with the exception of the smallest pittance to suffice for my subsistence, is your’s!”

“No, Emily—no!” exclaimed the Baronet. “Such a sacrifice on your part must not be made!”

“It is already resolved upon! it is almost as good as accomplished! Mr. Millard’s solicitor is acting in the matter—he has received instructions to bring the business to a termination with the least possible delay. Indeed, I am promised that by the day after to-morrow the requisite documents for my signature will be in readiness. Then, as a wife in this country cannot act altogether in independence of her husband, you must get Gustavus to give his assent—and all will be over!”

“Emily,” said Dalham,—“Emily,” he repeated, in a voice that was tremulous with emotion, “how can I possibly thank you enough for this proof of your generosity—your magnanimity—”

“Say rather of my sorrow and contrition for the past,” interjected the quadroom. “You need not tell Gustavus, if you should happen to see him before I leave the country,—you need not tell him, I repeat, what is being done. It were better that he should be kept in ignorance on the subject until after my departure. Then—*then* you may tell him that as I can never hope to see him again, and as I shall never more venture to ask him for his pardon, he must at least tutor himself to think less unkindly of me than he otherwise would!”

“But Emily,” said Roderick, “matters must not be left in this condition! There ought to be more happiness for you than you anticipate! Oh, you have shown so much goodness of heart—so much generosity, it almost makes me weep, Emily, to think that you look upon your prospects thus darkly!”

“I beseech you, Roderick,” she said, “not to dwell thus upon the subject. I know precisely how I am situated with Gustavus—Indeed, I will even add that I feel our separation is necessary for his happiness. He does not like to be loved too well—and I could not love him less fondly than I do! Therefore everything must take place as I have said. And now not another word upon the subject—but go and prepare Winifred to receive me, if only for a moment!”

Dalham was too full of emotion to give utterance to a single syllable of response to the last observations which had fallen from the quadroom’s lips: he pressed her hands fervidly, and hurried from the room. In a few minutes he returned; and he conducted Emily upstairs to the chamber where Winifred lay. We will not dwell upon the scene which ensued: suffice it to say that it was a most affecting one; for inasmuch as Emily proclaimed her inflexible resolution to leave her fortune in the manner which she had specified, Sir Roderick and Lady Dalham saw how futile it was to remonstrate against such a stupendous excess of bounty. It would therefore be to misrepresent human nature itself if we were to pretend that the father and mother of the new-born babe were not inspired with the liveliest emotions of happiness as they gazed upon that child and knew that it was now guaranteed against the ills of poverty. Fervid therefore—Oh! most fervid were the out-

pourings of their gratitude; and the quadroom wept as she murmured that this was one of the happiest moments of her life.

At length Emily took leave of Winifred, whom she called her "dearest cousin," and whom she promised that she would visit once more ere she took her departure for Jamaica. She accompanied Sir Roderick down stairs to the parlour; and then she said, "I must now bid you farewell likewise. You will hear from Mr. Millard's solicitor——"

"But you have promised to return once more," interrupted Roderick, "and pass an hour with Winifred ere you embark for Kingston."

"True!" responded Emily; "and I shall not fail to keep my pledge. Unless indeed——"

"Unless what?" asked Dalham hastily.

"Unless Gustavus should return," rejoined the quadroom, speaking slowly and apparently with reluctance. "In that case I should not come hither again. It would be better that we should not meet——yes, far better! And therefore, Roderick, if he should return to England before I leave for Jamaica, have the kindness to drop me a line stealthily. I will give you my present address."

Emily—the workings of whose beautiful countenance appeared to indicate the deepest emotion—penned with a tremulous hand a few words upon a piece of paper; and then in a low deep voice she said, "If I never see you again, Roderick, let me for the last time invoke heaven's blessing upon yourself, your wife, and your child!"

Having thus spoken, she pressed the Baronet's hand and hurried from the house.

The next day, between three and four o'clock in the afternoon, a cab drove up to the humble little residence of Sir Roderick and Lady Dalham; and Gustavus Barrington alighted. The welcome he experienced was a most cordial one on the part of the Baronet; while it was characterized with a mingled friendliness and confusion on that of Winifred. Gustavus saw that Winifred had need of leisure to compose the thoughts and recollections which his presence had conjured up; and he remained but for a very few minutes in her bedroom. Nothing was there said in reference to Emily:—indeed her name had not as yet been spoken from the moment that he crossed the threshold of the house. But when he and Sir Roderick were alone together in the parlour, the latter said, "I have some news for you."

"What mean you?" inquired Gustavus. "Surely it cannot be in reference to that unfortunate creature——"

"Do you mean your wife Emily?" asked the Baronet. "If so, I am alluding to her when I say that I have news for you."

"Ah!" cried Barrington; and he at once became violently agitated. "I know not what to think of her—whether she be mad and unaccountable for her actions, and therefore to be pitied—or whether she be deeply, insidiously wicked, and therefore to be dreaded—aye, almost execrated?"

"By heaven, no!" exclaimed Dalham with fervour. "I beseech you, Gustavus, to suspend your judgment. I do not think that you yourself thoroughly comprehend your own wife! Hitherto her disposition may have been unfathomable: but now methinks I can furnish you with

the plummet-line which shall reach to the bottom of that strange romantic soul."

"Again I ask what mean you?" inquired Gustavus. "Has Emily been here?"

"Yes—Emily has been here," was the response. "She came last evening."

"Did she tell you under what circumstances we parted in Florence?"

"No; she seemed at one time about to enter into particulars—and then she abruptly recoiled from the recapitulation. Whatever she may have done, she is deeply penitent!"

"Ah!" interposed Gustavus: "this may be a mere show and artifice with her in order to induce you to intercede with me."

"Quite the contrary!" exclaimed the Baronet. "From my own lips went forth the proposition that Winifred and I should act as mediators: but Emily declared that the idea was hopeless—she therefore declined it. Nay, more! she does not wish to see you—she has evidently resigned herself to the conviction that everything is at an end between you."

"Are you sure—are you sure, Roderick, that Emily was not playing some deep game?"

"Impossible!" cried the Baronet: "she had no game to play. I repeat, however great her offences against you may have been—even though she should have attempted to take your life——"

"Ah! Well, proceed;"—and the colour went and came rapidly on young Barrington's countenance. "You were saying——"

"That however great her wrongs towards you, she is deeply sensible of them, and she is penitent. Never was there a being more meek—more humble! And as for her manner towards myself—towards Winifred and our new-born child—Oh, Gustavus! it is impossible to doubt the excellence of that heart, strange, wild, and eccentric though many of its feelings and emotions may be!"

"Ah, Roderick, you are deceived!" said Gustavus: yet he spoke fletingly, and by no means confidently. "Mere words!"

"Not mere words, Gustavus!—but deeds!" ejaculated the Baronet. "What think you your wife came hither to announce?—what reparation do you suppose she resolved to make for her former insults towards Winifred?—what proof of contrition and penitence for her offences towards you? The noblest of sacrifices! Aye—and made in such a manner, too—with such a depth of feeling, Gustavus, I could weep when I think of all that passed betwixt your wife and me last evening!"

"Good God! is it so, Roderick?" stammered the young man. "But the sacrifice which Emily has made—what does it mean? I cannot for the life of me understand it!"

"If you, as her husband, give your consent, continued Dalham, "all her fortune, with the exception of some small income for her own maintenance, will be transferred into the hands of Winifred and myself!"

For a moment Gustavus looked astounded; and then suddenly regaining his self-possession, he said with a sound that resembled a passing bitter laugh, "No, no! Emily would not do such a thing as this! I know her too well."

"But she has done it!" exclaimed Roderick, in

a triumphant voice: for apart from all selfish considerations, he was glad to be enabled to maintain the fact of Emily's magnanimity against her husband's scepticism. "Here, read this letter! I received it this afternoon from Mr. Millard's solicitor. It corroborates all that Emily told me."

Gustavus took the letter, and ran his eyes over it; then he scanned its contents more attentively; and as he returned the document into Roderick's hand, he became very pale, faltering out, "Good God! if I have dealt too harshly with Emily! if there be any error on my part!"

"I adjure you, Gustavus, by everything sacred," exclaimed the Baronet, solemnly, "to look well into your own heart, and see whether there be any cause for self-reproach in reference to your wife? It is my duty to tell you—though little did she think I should gather up the observation which dropped from her lips with the idea of repeating it to you—she even declared that she did not blame you, nor make it a subject of reproach—"

"What—what was it that she said?" asked Gustavus, with feverish anxiety. "For heaven's sake tell me—keep me not in suspense!"

"She said that you were addicted to pleasure, and prone to be extravagant. Now, my dear Gustavus, pardon me for observing that certain tidings which by some indirect means reached my ears—Indeed, I will tell you frankly, it was through Mr. Millard—"

"I can guess what you are about to say!" interrupted Barrington. "You have heard that I was dissipated. It is true—it is true! but Emily was the cause!"

"Oh, say not this!" interrupted Roderick, reproachfully. "No woman could exercise such power over a man unless he himself were yielding and willing; and then his own weakness becomes a crime! But that is not all. Your wife made use of one remarkable phrase. It struck me with all the force of something conveying an idea that I had never heard before. She said that you liked not to be loved too well."

"Ah! she said *that*?" and Gustavus staggered as the recollection of all the quadroom's wild and almost fabulous fondness smote him like a blow.

"Yes—she said *that*," continued the Baronet, still in a solemn tone; "and it would be a frightful thing for you, Gustavus, hereafter to reflect that you had broken a heart whose greatest crime was that of loving you too well!"

"My God, if I have been in error!"—and Gustavus sank down upon a seat, trembling all over.

"There may have been faults on both sides," suggested Roderick.

"There may! there may!"—and Gustavus shivered as if under the influence of a glacial chill: he was generous enough to have a horror at the idea of doing an injury to any human being.

"At the same time," resumed the Baronet, "if you find it impossible to live together, I should not counsel you to do so: or perhaps I might advise a temporary separation. But as for an eternal one—no, no! it must not be thought of! I would sooner give up all idea of receiving this splendid proof of your wife's munificence, than that she should quit England for ever, to return to you no more! I am convinced that she possesses qualities of the noblest character, which circumstances are only now at length developing.

You must not judge her by the European standard—"

"By heaven! the very thing I have often said to myself!" ejaculated Gustavus.

"She may have been wayward in disposition—self-willed—exact even to a point that savoured of arrant despotism," continued the Baronet; "and yet she may have meant well all along, and she may have had a good heart. At all events, it is fair to suppose that if she had been reared and educated amidst European influences, her conduct would have been different, and she would have adopted less strange, less wild, less eccentric courses to carry out her aims."

"Where can I find her, Roderick?" suddenly demanded Gustavus, starting up from the chair on which he had flung himself.

"Here is her address," responded the Baronet, as he handed a piece of paper to Gustavus, who thereupon immediately quitted the house.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE LAST MEETING.

SPRINGING into the cab which was waiting at the door, Gustavus Barrington gave his directions to the driver; at the same time bidding him use all possible despatch, and he should be well paid. Away went the vehicle; and in due time it stopped at an hotel at the West End of the town. Gustavus leaped out, and inquired if Mrs. Barrington was within?

"Yes, sir," was the reply of the waiter to whom Gustavus addressed himself.

"Show me her room immediately!" cried Gustavus.

"But I think, sir, from what Mrs. Barrington said," objected the waiter, "she wishes to be altogether alone, and not to receive any visitors."

"But she will see me!" interrupted Gustavus; and he thrust a couple of half-crowns into the man's hand.

The waiter said not another word: the money was a convincing argument: and he at once led the way up to the sitting-apartment occupied by the quadroom. How the heart of Gustavus beat as the door was thrown open!—and so great was his emotion that a sudden dimness came over his eyes, so that he perceived not what expression Emily's countenance wore as she started up from her seat.

The waiter retired: Gustavus leant against the door-post; and Emily bent down her regards. She stood as if wanting to know what brought him thither, and with all the meekness of a penitent wife to obey whatsoever mandates he might issue, or whatsoever resolves he might have adopted.

At length, Gustavus advanced slowly, saying, in a faltering voice, to which he vainly endeavoured to impart a manly firmness, "You did not expect to see me, Emily?—or perhaps you might have thought that I would come? Which was it?"

"I did not think that you would come, Gustavus," she answered, in a low voice that seemed full of meekness and humility—and, oh! how those harmonious tones touched some of the tenderest chords which vibrated in the young man's

soul! "I cannot even conceive how you found me out."

"I will tell you at once," interrupted Gustavus. "I have been up to Kentish Town, and Roderick Dalham gave me your address."

"Roderick Dalham?" echoed Emily, with a start. "And yet I particularly wished him not to let you know where I was. I will tell you candidly, Gustavus—I thought it were better that we should not meet."

"It was for a good motive that Sir Roderick disobeyed your injunction," interjected Gustavus; and he could not help thinking that an expression of pensive humility was marvellously becoming to his wife's countenance.

"If Sir Roderick's object were to enable you to give me some parting instructions, before I leave for Jamaica, then of course he has acted wisely and well."

"Tell me, Emily," said Gustavus, to whose ear the altered tone of his wife's voice sounded like the most delicious harmony,—"tell me, are you grieved and annoyed that I should have thus found you out?"

"I cannot be grieved and annoyed, Gustavus," she replied, "at beholding you again, since you speak to me in such a gentle tone, and you evidently are not come to upbraid me. If your object be to say that you forgive me before I take my departure it will be very kind of you—nay generous—more than I deserve!"

The quadronee stopped short: her bosom heaved as if it were about to burst; and Gustavus recollected with a rapturous feeling how often his head had lain pillowed on that superb bust.

"Emily," he said,—"Emily, I have come to tell you that I forgive you!"

"Ah, then," she murmured, with a voice that seemed full of emotion, "the only hope that I dared entertain is fulfilled—and I shall go into eternal exile with a heart relieved of at least a portion of the tremendous load that recently sat upon it. Gustavus, I repeat, this is very generous on your part."

"But you, Emily, have shown yourself very, very generous towards—you know whom I mean—Sir Roderick Dalham——"

"He is an excellent man—warm-hearted and magnanimous," said the quadronee, softly yet impressively.

"And my cousin Winifred."

"She is my cousin also. I love her indeed as much as if she were my sister. God forgive me that I should ever have done ought to excite a pang in her noble and virtuous heart!"

"Emily, is it possible that you mean to give them up all your father's fortune?" asked Gustavus, vehemently.

"All with the exception of one hundred pounds a-year," she replied mildly yet decisively. "That sum will suffice for me in the seclusion to which I shall retire!"

"And you think that you will never repent of the sacrifice?" demanded the young man, who almost at every fresh question or remark advanced nearer and nearer towards his wife.

"Repent? sacrifice?" repeated the quadronee, as if surprised that such words should be addressed to her: then with a smile which seemed to express a species of holy enthusiasm, and which revealed the

beautiful white teeth between the vermilion of the lips, she said, "Oh, it will prove my only source of happiness hereafter to reflect that I have made some little atonement to your sweet cousin Winifred, and that I have been enabled to guarantee her child against the ill and horrors of poverty."

Gustavus felt his heart beating violently as he thought within himself, "Good heavens, what a wondrous change has taken place in her!"—then as his eyes slowly wandered over her form from head to foot, he could not help dwelling upon the admirable symmetry of her shape, set off to advantage as it now was by a plain but elegant evening dress.

"You are not sorry then, Emily," he presently said, scarcely knowing indeed what to say, and feeling almost as embarrassed and awkward as a lover, when wooing a damsel in the very earliest stages of courtship,—"you are not sorry, then, that I have once more sought you?"

"I have told you that I am glad, Gustavus," she mildly answered.

"And what if I were to tell you," he proceeded, "that your conduct in respect to the Dalhams has made a great impression upon me?"

"I am glad to hear that you do not disapprove of the proceeding; and therefore I take it for granted that you will be willing to sign the document which the attorney is drawing up, and by virtue of which you as a husband give the assent that is requisite to render the wife's action valid."

"Oh, certainly! I will sign the document," exclaimed Gustavus. "Not for worlds would I stand in the way of a good deed! But do you not think, Emily, that my fortune would still be enough for you and me?"

"You are very good, Gustavus, but I require none of it. The hundred a year which I propose to keep, will suffice for me in Jamaica!"—and she still continued to speak in a soft, level, monotonous harmony of voice, as if her language flowed from the depths of a soul that was subdued, or from the midst of a spirit that was wounded and crushed.

"You do not understand me, Emily," said Gustavus, whose heart appeared for a moment as if it were coming up into his very throat, so strong were the emotions that now seized upon him. "What if I were to propose that all the past be forgotten, and that we live together again?"

"I should say, Gustavus," responded Emily, still calm and self-possessed, "that a sense of duty towards yourself would prevent me from answering in the affirmative. I have not hitherto been enabled to ensure your happiness—circumstances have occurred which render it impossible that you can love me—indeed, Gustavus, apart from these moments of generous impulse to which you are liable, you must actually hate me."

"Hate you? No, no! by heaven no!"—and Gustavus endeavoured to seize his wife's hand: but she drew back, with an air of gentleness yet firmness, so that he seemed to experience a shock as he cried, "Oh! is it possible that you have ceased to love me?"

"I, Gustavus?—Oh!" and the quadronee shook her head as much as to imply that that were indeed an impossibility.

"Then why do you recoil from me?" demanded the young man passionately.

"*Becol*, Gustavus? That is not the word!" she answered deprecatingly. "But listen to me. I would save you from the consequences of this far too generous impulse which you are now obeying. You would take me to live with you again—and in a short time——"

"Say no more, Emily! I swear it shall not so happen! There must be mutual concessions!"

"For my part, Gustavus," she replied, in a tone that was scarcely audible—and yet it was not tremulous, only exceedingly soft and subdued; "I feel my spirit so completely broken that all wholesome life seems dead within me. God knows that I shall never again have energy sufficient to injure a human being, even if I were to possess the will—and that is not likely, for my heart is changed, and I know not what strange mysterious revulsion has taken place within me!"

"It is all for the better, Emily!" exclaimed Gustavus enthusiastically: "it is all for the better! As a proof, your noble conduct towards those whose very names but a short time back you would not have allowed to be mentioned in your hearing!"

"I pray you, Gustavus," interrupted the quadronee, with a sweet melancholy smile which imparted an ineffable beauty to a countenance which as a general rule might be described as strikingly handsome;—"I pray you not to revert to a subject which I should look upon as trifling indeed, were it not that it has succeeded in convincing our kinsfolk of my changed and loving feelings towards them—aye, and convinced you that my heart is not altogether so black as you imagined it."

"And since you have thus convinced me," exclaimed Barrington eagerly,—"and since you know that I am thus convinced, does it not place us altogether on a different footing towards each other? May we not look upon the past as so many sources of experience to guide us for the future?"

"Yes—indeed it is so," answered the quadronee.

Gustavus paced twice or thrice across the apartment as if in a sort of feverish, unsettled, impatient deliberation; and then stopping suddenly short, he said, "Well, Emily, if you think that we are not yet in a position to ensure each other's happiness, I have yet one last proposition to make."

"Speak," she said.

"Go to Jamaica if you will," he continued; "see that whatsoever last instructions your father may have left behind him are properly fulfilled—and drop the tears of filial sorrow over his grave. This separation need not be a long one—a matter of a few brief months—and it may result in fully confirming those good impressions which are now being made upon our souls."

"Do you suggest this, Gustavus?" asked Emily, in the same low level voice as before.

"Yes," he rejoined. "Do you agree to it?"

"I am your wife—and I swore to obey you at the altar—and if I have never done so before, I will at least fulfil my pledges now. Command, and I obey."

"No, no! do not use the word *command*. We will have nothing imperious betwixt you and me for the future. Let us say that it is an agreement which we make between us."

"It is an agreement," she replied.

Gustavus now threw his arms about her neck and strained her to his breast. For a few moments it seemed as if he were embracing a statue; and then all in an instant she grew warm and impassioned, glowing and ardent, as was her wont in past times.

"Now, dear Emily," said Gustavus, "peace is re-established between us! But we will not disturb the compact as it stands. Indeed, much as I again love you, I will not suffer my common sense to be absorbed in my passion. I do verily believe it is for our mutual happiness that this brief separation for a few months will take place. But enough of the subject! Let us at least pass a happy evening together.—You have not dined?"

"No. Until just now the idea of even sitting down to table would have been with me a mockery!" and there was something like the old tone of glowing enthusiasm in the quadronee's harmonious voice.

Gustavus rang the bell: dinner was ordered; and as the waiter was now engaged in the apartment in spreading the table, and afterwards in giving his attendance while Mr. and Mrs. Barrington partook of the repast, the conversation turned only on ordinary and general topics. Gustavus seemed to have recovered almost his wonted spirits without any intemperate application to the bottle: while Emily's mood was soft, tender, and caressing, without the slightest degree of imperiousness, but likewise without that impassioned ardour which formerly characterized all her bearing towards her husband. At length, when the dessert was placed upon the table, they were left alone together.

"I am delighted," said Gustavus, sipping his wine, "to think that you have not merely made it up with Winifred, but likewise that you are most devotedly attached to me. When you return from Jamaica we shall all be so happy—Oh, so happy! I will have a handsome house ready for your reception: the Dalhams, being now well off through your goodness, will likewise be living in excellent style. Sometimes we will visit them—and sometimes they shall visit us: and you will be as fond of Winifred's child as if it were your own—and I also shall love it! In short, Emily, I do believe that heaven sent us those dreadful storms in order that there should be the lull of a most perfect calm for the rest of our lives!"

"Indeed it is a perfect picture of happiness which you are drawing, Gustavus," she said.

"Pledge me to that effect, my beloved Emily!" he cried.

"Oh, yes," she exclaimed: "I will drink glass for glass with you!—for now I begin to feel a wild thrilling delight!—it is the intoxication of real happiness! it is a bliss such as I have not known, Gustavus, for many a long, long day! Were it not for the pending separation——"

"Oh, but *that*, you know, is entirely for our mutual good!" he interjected.

"No doubt—since your mind seems to be settled upon the point," observed the quadronee quietly. "See, Gustavus! I pledge you in this glass," she added, her voice instantaneously swelling into enthusiastic tones again.

"And I pledge you, dearest, with equal fervour!" he cried. "It would have been in-



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deed a pity if fate had resolved to separate us eternally."

"Could you have lived altogether apart from me, Gustavus?" she asked: "would not the memories of all our past love have continually haunted you? would you not have thought of me as you first knew me in Jamaica? and would you not have sorrowed that circumstances should ever have transpired to sever us?"

"Ah! now that we are again together, dear Emily," responded the young man,—"now that I behold you once more, and mark how beautiful you are—it does indeed appear to me as if it would break my heart to pronounce the words that we must separate for ever! And now I will tell you

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something, Emily, which will prove how really much I love you, and what a strong hold you have obtained on my affections. I am about for a moment to allude to the other day—that dreadful day—you know what I mean—at the hotel in Florence—nearly a fortnight ago, when we parted——"

"Yes, yes, Gustavus! What do you mean?"—and having refilled the glasses, she drew her chair closer to his own—she leant forward, and gazed with her large luminous eyes earnestly upon his countenance.

"I will tell you," he resumed. "You fled rapidly from the room where that dreadful scene took place: but scarcely had the door closed be-

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bind you, when I experienced a sensation like a remorse—I felt that I was doing wrong to suffer you, a young inexperienced creature—the child too of such wayward impulses—to go forth into the world alone—”

“And why did you not come after me, Gustavus?” inquired the quadroon.

“Oh, because—because, Emily—indeed, you ought to understand—or you must not be angry with me if I explain—”

“No, no! I comprehend you! After such a scene as *that*, Gustavus, you felt that you ought to proclaim everything to be at an end between us, and that it would be a veritable weakness on your part if you were to yield to any false notion of generosity under such circumstances! Have I not rightly interpreted your motives and your reflections?”

“Yes—to a certain extent—indeed I think wholly,” faltered Gustavus; for he was afraid that he was approaching upon delicate ground. “However, my dear Emily,” he immediately added, “you will admit that the feelings with which I was inspired on the occasion, were a proof of the lingering love that I entertained for you—”

“Yes—Oh, yes!” she ejaculated; and then in a low—very low, and scarcely audible tone, she murmured, “The lingering love!”

“But after all,” resumed Gustavus, having emptied his glass—an example which was followed by the quadroon,—“it was better that things should have taken the course which they have done. Now let me see? That dreadful day at Florence was the 23rd of November, and this is the 5th of December. Twelve days! And what changes have been wrought in this brief interval! How altered have you become, my Emily! How wonderfully have all the best qualities of your nature been developed! Pardon me for saying that some of your loftiest attributes lay dormant—unknown—aye, even unsuspected—until circumstances thus suddenly brought them to light. But what was the cause? It was the separation that took place between us! And all this immense amount of good was effected by a separation of only twelve days!”

“And what inference would you proceed thence to draw, Gustavus?” asked the quadroon, still contemplating her husband earnestly with those magnificent eyes which even seemed to become more luminous as the conversation progressed, or with each additional drop of wine which passed her lips.

“The inference is unmistakable, my dear Emily,” answered Gustavus. “If twelve days of separation produced such a salutary effect, what must be the result of this far longer severance which is now to take place? Ah, my dear Emily! you showed your wisdom in agreeing to it! It will prove the starting-point of a new course of happiness for us both!”

“You reason upon it, Gustavus,” said the quadroon, “with a species of philosophic coolness.”

“To be sure, Emily!—because I know it is for our mutual good.”

“And how think you, dear Gustavus, the time will pass for you in my absence? Shall you be happy?”

“Happy, Emily? Oh, yes!—because I shall be looking forward to the period of your return

when I may again clasp you in my arms, and welcome you as my beloved wife who thenceforth is resolved to study my happiness to the utmost!”

There was already a deepening of the rich carnation tint upon the quadroon’s cheeks; but now deeper still did it glow through the transparent duskiess of her complexion, and more luminous became the superb black eyes which were gazing so earnestly upon Gustavus.

“And then too,” he continued, “I shall very frequently be with the Delahams—”

“Oh, very frequently, no doubt!” interjected the quadroon: and for a moment so strange a fire seemed to flash from her eyes that Gustavus started: but he immediately recovered his self-possession, feeling convinced that it was mere fancy on his part.

“To be sure! I shall be almost constantly with them,” he continued: “I shall make them my only companions, because I shall care but little for society until your return. And now that I know you love Winifred as you ought to do—”

“Love her? Oh, yes! certainly! No doubt I love her just as I ought to do!”—and now there was something in the quadroon’s looks which struck Gustavus as being so peculiar that a suspicion arose in his mind,—but a suspicion so vague, indefinite, and fleeting, that it almost instantaneously ceased to trouble him.

“To be sure, Emily,” he went on to say, “it is impossible to doubt the sincerity of the love—the sisterly love I may even call it—which you experience for Winifred after the munificent proof you have given of it. And Ah! when I take the child in my arms—as I know I shall often do—”

“Oh, I was sure you would! I was sure you would!”—and it was with a strange energy that the quadroon spoke.

“Ah, I see that you love the innocent little babe as much as you do its mother,” proceeded Gustavus.—“But do you not think the room is very warm, Emily?” he abruptly asked. “I feel as if I had a flush upon my countenance—yes, and a heat throughout my entire frame. It is absolutely feverish! And yet heaven knows I have not taken a great deal of wine!”

“It is through sitting so close to the fire,” answered Emily. “The room however is hot: but then the December weather outside is very cold—and it would be impossible to have the window open; while as for the door, the servants keep passing along the passage.”

“Well, I suppose I shall get cooler presently,” interrupted Gustavus. “But you also, my dear Emily, are flushed. And Oh! if you only saw how bright your eyes are shining!”

“Indeed?”—and the quadroon, starting up from her seat, threw a look into the mirror over the mantel; and therein she caught the reflection of the vivid lightnings which were rendering her large black orbs fearfully luminous.

“I told you so,” said young Barrington, as he also rose up from his seat. “But by heaven! it seems to me as if my own eyes were brighter than usual!—and Ah! there is indeed a flush upon my cheeks!”

“Your eyes are always handsome, Gustavus,” exclaimed the quadroon, throwing her arms about his neck; “and you know that your cheeks always become flushed with even three or four glasses of

wine. Sit down, and let me resume our discourse."

"Let me see? what were we talking about?" said the young man, as he and the quadroon resumed themselves.

"You were telling me how you would make the time pass away in my absence—how you would be constantly with Roderick and Winifred—how you would fondle their child—"

"Ah! and I was about to observe," added Gustavus, "that when I hold that innocent little baby in my arms, I shall think to myself it was through your goodness, Emily, that both the infant and its parents are guaranteed against the ills of poverty."

"Oh! doubtless you will be very very fond of that child?" said the quadroon; but it was in a voice so strange that Gustavus started, and again his looks were hung full of suspicion upon his wife.

"Emily," he exclaimed, "is it possible that there is again anything wrong between us? My God! if I have been deceived—"

"Oh, Gustavus!" exclaimed the quadroon, "you have indeed deceived yourself if you think that I could endure a separation of several long, long months!"

"Emily!"—and it was almost a start of affright that Gustavus gave, while stronger still became the suspicion in his mind that there was something wrong. "Oh, how your looks are altered!"

"Ah! Gustavus!" she cried, her eyes flashing lightnings more vivid than before, and her white teeth gleaming between her lips; "do you fancy that all this is real and that I have been acting as I have felt?"

"Good God! what mean you?"—and Gustavus sank back in his chair with a sense of vague and awful dismay.

"I mean that I would sooner die than separate from you!—that I could not endure it!—that the idea itself was death! I mean also that never, never would I allow you to become the companion of Winifred again! By heaven, no!"—and it was almost with rage that the quadroon struck her clenched hand upon the table.

"Emily, Emily! what have you done?" demanded Gustavus, now smitten with a presentiment that something terrible was about to occur, or else about to be revealed to his ears. "The fortune which you made over to the Dalhams—"

"Pardon me, Gustavus—pardon me!" interrupted the quadroon; "but all my generosity was a mere hypocrisy! I wanted to see you once more—to bring you unto me—to have you again with me—that we might be alone together!—and I had recourse to that stratagem—I foresaw that it would succeed—and it has succeeded!"

"By God, Emily!" exclaimed Gustavus, starting up from his chair, "I will not again be your dupe!—Yet what is this that I feel? This heat—this fever of the blood—"

"Pardon, pardon, Gustavus!" cried the quadroon, once more addressing him in those words of passionate appeal: but now she threw herself upon her knees before him, clasping her hands as she repeated the words, "Pardon! pardon!"

"No!—forgiveness is impossible!" cried Gustavus. "Your conduct—O God! what do I feel? what is this that comes over me?"—and he staggered a pace or two.

"Pardon me, Gustavus!" exclaimed the quadroon. "It is my last crime!—but the poison is circling in your veins—and we shall die together!"

With a wild cry Barrington threw up both his arms in affright and despair; and then as he was about to rush towards the door to cry out for assistance, he reeled and fell. In a moment the quadroon was at that door—she locked it—drew out the key, and tossed it into the fire.

Gustavus' senses had not however abandoned him: it was only a giddiness which had prostrated him. Another moment and his head was supported on his wife's lap: but he crawled away from her, exclaiming, though with painful and difficult utterance, "Avaunt, wretch! avaunt, murderers!"

"O Gustavus," she murmured, "if we could not live together, we must at least die together! Upon this I was resolved—and to accomplish this aim have I been labouring! But, Ah! if when you came to me this evening you had asked me to remain in England—if with the language of reviving love you had besought me not to go to Jamaica, all my purpose would have been altered, and we should not be perishing now! But you proved implacable upon that point. Two or three times I tried you—and I saw that your resolution was fixed. Then also was my own resolution confirmed—and I said, '*We will die together!*' When you retired for a moment to wash your hands after dinner, I infused the deadly poison in the wine that had been brought up for the dessert!"

Gustavus was now lying helpless and powerless, with his head upon a footstool, gazing in half vacant, half wild horror and consternation at his wife, who was evidently much less under the influence of the poison than he. He gave vent to a moan of despair, and feebly murmured, "For God's sake call for assistance, Emily!—summon a surgeon! I will forgive you—I swear by heaven I will forgive you if you do this!"

"It is useless, Gustavus! it is useless, my beloved husband!" replied the quadroon, moving nearer towards him, and taking his hand, which he however had sufficient energy to snatch from her grasp. "The poison has no antidote!—or at all events its influence has gone too far!"

"Wretch!" muttered Gustavus: "wretch! wretch!"—and his eyes, which had already begun to glaze, flamed with a sudden fierceness upon her.

"Oh, why upbraid me in our last moments?" she asked: "why not forgive me? Even this is a proof of my love! I could not endure to be separated from you—and therefore I die with you! Oh, the love of one in whose veins rolls the blood of that torrid clime where I was born, is a wondrous thing—and may become terrible!"

"Terrible!—my God!" moaned Gustavus. "Oh, Emily! if there be yet a chance for us both to live—"

"There is none! there is none! Make your peace with heaven, Gustavus—and begin by forgiving me!"

"Good God, is all this real? or is it a dream?"—and the wretched young man endeavoured to raise himself up; but finding that he could not, he again made an effort to crawl towards the door—and again he sank exhausted. "To die! to die!"

he murmured, now writhing and convulsing on the corpse like a stricken snake: "just God! is it possible?"

"And we are dying together, Gustavus!" said a soft musical voice in his ear; and then soft warm arms were wound about his neck, and his head was drawn towards a glowing bosom. "Oh, let us die thus!"

"No! no!"—and with another forcible effort—one of the last evidences of his expiring energies—Gustavus tore himself from her embrace; and reaching an arm-chair, he tried to raise himself into it. "To lie down," he murmured, "is suffocation—death! If I could but sit up!"

The quadrone hastened to place herself in that chair; and again she drew her husband towards her, saying, "You shall sit up, dearest! There! let your head be pillowed upon my bosom—and my last breath shall be expended upon a kiss on your lips!"

Gustavus struggled again—but this time it was fruitless; and as he experienced a numbness and torpor coming over him, he abandoned himself to his doom.

"My aim is accomplished!" he heard the voice of the quadrone breathing in his ear; and it sounded like music stealing in upon a dream—vague, indefinite, yet with a sweetness and softness ineffable and magical: "and we are dying together! Together we wandered amidst the beautiful flowers and delicious fruit-trees of my native land; and together we shall penetrate into those unknown scenes which lie beyond the grave! Oh, it is bliss to die thus!—and I do not feel that I have committed a crime; for it is the inspiration of love that I am obeying—and Oh! a love so immense and illimitable as mine, must be a virtue whereon the angels smile! Sleep, my Gustavus, sleep!—we are not to be separated!—and if your lips could not for ever smile on me, they at least shall not smile upon another! and if your eyes could not always beam with love for me, they shall never beam with fondness for another! Sleep on, my Gustavus!—slumber now comes upon me also! Oh, 'tis sweet to die thus! Art thou gone, my Gustavus? has thy spirit fled, my well-beloved? is thy cheek growing colder and colder against my bosom? Then, Oh! come quickly, Death! and bear me away also! A last kiss—a last!—the fondest of all! And now—and now—let my soul take wing!"

Here we must suddenly and abruptly divert the reader's attention from this strange, wild, and terribly romantic episode, to speak of something else that was occurring. It was about eleven o'clock at night, when a domestic, dressed in a groom's livery, called at the humble residence of the Dalhams in Kentish Town; and as the servants had just gone to bed, Sir Roderick himself answered the summons at the front door.

"If you please, sir, is my master here?" inquired the domestic.

"I suppose you are Mr. Barrington's servant?" observed Dalham. "Well then, your master was here this afternoon; but he left between four and five o'clock."

"He has not returned home to his hotel, sir. His dinner was ready at six o'clock—Mr. Wardour the barrister was to dine with him. I took master's note to that gentleman in the Temple; and

according to the answer that he gave me I was to order dinner for one or two persons at six o'clock—"

"My good fellow," interrupted Sir Roderick, "the mystery may be soon cleared up. I have not the slightest doubt I can tell you where you may find your master!"—and he named the hotel where Mrs. Barrington had taken up her quarters. "In a word, your mistress is there—and your master has gone to see her."

"Thank you, sir!"—and away sped the groom.

John had his misgivings—he scarcely knew why, nor could he even explain to himself what their nature was. But he knew precisely under what circumstances his master and mistress had separated in Florence, and the fearful scene which had occurred when the quadrone intended to shoot Gustavus and then take her own life by poison. It was not therefore very extraordinary that the groom should be alike suspicious and anxious on account of this meeting which to his astonishment was taking place in London. Moreover, he thought it strange that Gustavus had not sent to the hotel to excuse his absence to Mr. Wardour the barrister: but the fact was that the young man, when once he found himself with Emily, became so absorbed in his interview with her, that he quite forgot the circumstance of having invited a guest to dine with him elsewhere.

The groom proceeded without delay to the hotel which Sir Roderick Dalham had mentioned; and on arriving there, he asked the waiter if a gentleman named Barrington was within?

"Yes—I believe so," was the response; "but I really don't know. A gentleman came to dine with a lady of that name—I think they must be husband and wife—"

"They are—they are," said John.

"Well then," continued the waiter, with an air that indicated some little degree of surprise, "are you astonished that they should be together?"

"Oh, no—not at all! But perhaps it would be better if I should see whether master has got any orders to give me; because as he and mistress did not arrive in town together, his luggage is at another hotel."

"I will go up and say that you are here," rejoined the waiter.

He ascended the stairs accordingly: but in a few moments he came very quickly down again, saying, "The door is locked—I can't make any one hear. If they're both fallen asleep, I knocked loud enough to awake them. I peeped through the keyhole—for the key is taken out of the lock—but I can't see them."

"Good God! something has happened!" ejaculated John, a sudden dismay seizing upon his countenance. "I suspected it! I almost know'd it!"

"Something happened?" echoed the waiter. "Here, policemen!" he cried to a constable who was at the instant passing the hotel: "you're wanted."

"What is it?" asked the officer, stepping into the entrance-way.

The matter was soon explained to him; and he said, "Well, the shortest thing to do if the people don't answer from inside the room, is to break open the door."

"Yes—that's the only thing!" ejaculated the groom.

Upstairs went the policeman and John, followed by the master of the hotel and all the waiters in addition to the one who had previously been acting in the business. The officer knocked at the door: there was no answer. He then put his shoulder against it, and forced it open. What a spectacle met the eyes of those whose looks were now plunged into the apartment! For there—half reclining in a large arm-chair—was the quadroon, almost as beautiful in death as in life,—her arms lying around the form of her husband, whose head was pillowed upon her bosom. And both were dead!

CHAPTER LXIII.

SIENNA.

WE now again shift the scene to the land of Italy; and we must return to the city of Sienna, where we left our hero Charles De Vere under sentence of death.

The official residence of General Germini was in the Great Square, and precisely opposite to the Town Hall. He had long been a widower: but he possessed two daughters, who were young and handsome, and who bore the sweet Christian names of Laura and Mirtilla. The former had dark hair and an Italian brunette complexion: the latter had light brown hair and a Saxon complexion of purest white and red. But she possessed a pair of large dark Italian eyes, which gave a certain peculiarity to her style of beauty, rendering it however all the more interesting. These young ladies bore not the slightest resemblance to their father in character or disposition; for inasmuch as he was stern, cruel, and unscrupulous, they were full of humanity and compassion, and gifted with all the sweetest and softest attributes of their sex.

On hearing that a young Count had been brought to Sienna, and was to undergo his trial before their father for an alleged complicity in the late treasonable attempt upon Leghorn, Laura and Mirtilla became much interested in the prisoner. They asked a great many questions concerning him; and they heard sufficient to enhance that feeling of interest with which they were already inspired. They might, if they had chosen, have availed themselves of their father's authority to obtain admission into the apartment where the trial took place; but a certain proper delicacy of feeling prevented them from doing this; and they therefore contented themselves with sitting behind the curtain of their chamber-window to obtain a view of the unfortunate young Count of Camerino as he was conducted to and from the Town Hall. They saw him as he was being led thither; and both were immediately struck with his appearance—that is to say, their compassionate interest was confirmed and strengthened on his behalf; but we do not mean it to be inferred that they all in a moment caught up a more tender sentiment into their hearts; for we may incidentally observe that both Laura and Mirtilla were affianced to two handsome young Italian officers

of rank, whom they dearly loved, and who were in a short time to lead them to the altar.

"How shocking," said Laura, when Charles had passed away from the view and had been conducted into the Town Hall,—“how shocking to think that one so young, so handsome, and so elegant should have got himself into such a fearful dilemma!”

"And, Oh!" said the gentle Mirtilla, with a visible shudder, "to think that our own father should be compelled to pass sentence of death, perhaps, on such a young gentleman!"

"Alas! I fear," observed Laura, "that if this sentence be pronounced, it will be carried into execution: for our father is very severe in everything that pertains to his military duties."

"And besides," added Mirtilla, "the instructions which he has received from the Government allow of no discretionary power on his part. Let us hope, dear sister, that matters may turn out better than common report seems to predicate."

A couple of hours passed, during which Laura and Mirtilla remained at the window speculating upon the result of the trial, and constantly expressing their sincere and generous hopes that the handsome young Count of Camerino would leave the tribunal acquitted and triumphant. Presently the sounds of some equipage approaching at a very rapid rate along a neighbouring street, reached the ears of the young ladies; and they soon beheld the crowd making way for the coming vehicle. It was a postchaise: and as it stopped in the middle of the Square, the sisters could discern that it only contained one occupant—and this was a lady. She was asking questions of the persons who were nearest to the chaise; and though the sisters were too far off to see the effect which the answers produced upon her, yet they could not help fancying that the presence of the lady there was in some way connected with the trial that was in progress.

"Ah! what has happened?" suddenly ejaculated Laura.

"They open the door of the chaise!" cried Mirtilla. "See! that gentleman springs into the vehicle!"

"They are lifting her out! Poor lady! she has evidently fainted!"

"Decidedly she must be connected with the unfortunate young Count!—Ah! it was to give her air that they lifted her out of the chaise!"

"And now there seems to be a sort of bewilderment amongst the people who are surrounding her! I do believe," continued Laura, "the poor gentleman is in a dangerous state, and they are at a loss what to do with her or whither to convey her!"

"Ah, poor creature!" added Mirtilla: "only conceive if she be the mother or sister of the prisoner—or his betrothed, Laura!"

"Ah, his betrothed, Mirtilla! Think of what we should feel if——"

"Laura dearest!" interjected the younger sister, "let us send and offer to receive that poor lady into the house!"

Laura nodded an assent: the sisters glided down to the drawing-room, rang the bell, and issued their instructions. The old housekeeper herself, who was a good-tempered woman, undertook to go forth on the charitable errand which the General's daughters suggested; and she soon found that the humane instincts of those amiable dam-

people had surmised the truth. The poor stranger lady, on hearing that the young Count of Camerino was on his trial for his life, and that little if any hope was entertained as to the result, had gone off in a swoon, which still lasted and looked like death itself. To get her away from the midst of the crowd's pressure, to some place where medical attendance could be at once afforded, was the subject of instantaneous discussion amongst the humane persons who had interested themselves in the matter: but there was no hotel close at hand—and no one on the spot seemed to be a resident in that immediate neighbourhood. There was consequently some little bewilderment and discussion, when all in a moment General Germini's housekeeper appeared on the scene, with a request on the part of her two young mistresses that the stranger lady might be borne into their habitation.

In a few minutes, therefore, the inanimate form of the stranger was stretched upon the sofa in the drawing-room where the sisters were: those who bore the lady thither retired; and besides the sisters there remained only a surgeon and the old housekeeper. The lady appeared to be about forty years of age: it might be a little less—but she certainly was not more. She possessed the remains of great beauty—for her profile was faultless: but she was of sickly appearance, even apart from the swoon in which she was plunged.

"She may be the poor young gentleman's mother," whispered Laura to Mirtilla. "She has evidently been very beautiful in her time—and her figure, you see, is still excellent in its symmetry.—Do you think she will recover, signor?"

These last words were addressed to the surgeon, who was busily engaged in administering restoratives, and doing what he could for his inanimate patient.

"I hope so, signoretta—I hope so. Yes, now she gives signs of life! Look, the lips are quivering! Ah, it is sometimes very painful to recover from swoons so profound as this. It seems as if one had touched upon the confines of death itself, and that nature's effort to recover its right of existence must inevitably be accompanied by fearful pangs!"

Meanwhile the lady was assuredly recovering her senses; and as she opened her eyes, she gazed in mingled terror and vacancy upon those who were around her, until a smile appeared upon her lips as her looks settled on the beautiful and amiable countenances of the sisters.

"It must have been a dream—a hideous dream!" she murmured: and then closing her eyes, she gave vent to a long-drawn sigh.

But now, as her consciousness completely returned, memory began to exercise its functions with a power and effect which would not permit her any longer to cradle herself in the flattering delusion that it was a dream; and she soon saw that it was all a reality only too horrible.

"My son! my son!" she moaned in English, at the same time wringing her hands in despair.

"What can we do for you, signora?" asked Laura in Italian.

"I ought to thank you, amiable and excellent young ladies," replied the stranger, now also speaking in Italian, but with a strong foreign accent, "for your kindness and generosity towards me.

Heaven will reward you! I am the mother of——"

She could say no more, but burst into tears.

The sisters wept from sympathy with the poor lady: the surgeon and the housekeeper were moved; but no one would venture to suggest a single syllable of hope, because they knew not upon what ground it could possibly be based; for it had been rumoured that the trial was going dead against the young Count of Camerino—and the surgeon had just now whispered the report to the sisters ere Mrs. de Vere opened her eyes to returning consciousness.

"Tell me," said the half-distracted lady, "is General Germini, before whom I hear my son is arraigned—is he a humane man?"

"These, signora," answered the surgeon, "are the General's daughters—and you are in his house."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. de Vere, a gleam of hope expanding rapidly upon her pale careworn countenance; "if these be the daughters of him who is now the arbiter of my son's fate, I need not despair!"

Laura and Mirtilla both turned aside for a moment with saddened looks: but Mrs. de Vere did not notice the circumstance, for she was raising her eyes and inwardly praying that God would move the heart of the military judge to be merciful to her son.

"Signora," said the surgeon, who was an upright and conscientious man, and who felt that he could not leave the matter precisely as it stood, "I consider it my duty to remind you that very little, if anything, depends on the disposition of the military judge in such cases as these. He has no discretionary power. It is simply for him to hear the evidence that may be given for or against; and it is not even his own opinion which decides the question in the long run. He can merely vote along with his associates if there be any doubt upon the issue."

"Yes—I ought to know this," said Mrs. de Vere, in a mournful tone. "And therefore, my dear young ladies, whatever may be the event of that dreadful ordeal—even though the very worst may happen—yet rest assured that my heartfelt gratitude shall ever be yours!"

"Hark!" said the surgeon: "there is a rush amongst the crowd! What does it mean?"

He advanced to the window and looked out.

"Do you—do you think," inquired Mrs. de Vere, tottering towards him, and grasping him with nervous violence by the arm,—"do you think that the sentence is pronounced?"

"No—it is not *that*," responded the surgeon. "Pshaw! it is only a billsticker!—and the silly people are rushing to read what is on the placard that he is now posting! Alas, while matters of life and death are progressing in one place, the giddy multitude rush in other places to gratify their curiosity on the most trivial subjects—a new opera—a travelling menagerie—or any other show or sport that is advertised!"

"Yes; such is life—such is the world!" murmured Mrs. de Vere. "Oh, this suspense! Oh, my poor boy!—to think that he should have become implicated in such a proceeding! It is to me the most unheard-of mystery!"

"Did his lordship, your son, entertain strong

political opinions, signora?" inquired the medical man.

"Not at all," was the response; "and this only makes the matter all the more surprising. Besides, methought he was on his way to England for some very different purpose! Oh, just heaven have mercy upon him! spare him, O God, I beseech thee!"—and the poor mother joined her hands together, as her countenance was upraised with an expression of mingled entreaty and anguish.

"Now," exclaimed the surgeon, "there seems to be a sensation amidst the crowd yonder, in the neighbourhood of the entrance to the Town Hall! Yes—depend upon it, the sentence is known!"

Mrs. De Vere endeavoured to rise up from the sofa to approach the window—but she could not: neither could she give utterance to an articulate sound: she sat gasping for breath. Deeply, deeply did the amiable sisters compassionate her: the tears were trickling down her cheeks—and they whispered to each other, "Heaven grant that he may be saved! heaven grant it!"

"Hasten, signor—hasten," said the old housekeeper, "and learn what the result is. See the suspense which this poor lady is enduring!—it is an agony!"

"You will soon know," responded the surgeon, in a low tone. "It is not necessary to go from this window to learn the result!"

"What mean you!" asked the housekeeper. "The populace would not shout if the young Count were acquitted: the authorities have issued proclamations against riot, noise, and disturbance——"

"Do you not understand me, dame?" interrupted the surgeon, still speaking in a low tone, which was likewise solemnly mournful. "If the prisoner be acquitted, he will presently issue forth with his friends: but if he be condemned he will be brought away in the midst of the guard."

The surgeon did not intend these words to be overheard by Mrs. De Vere: indeed he was deliberating in his mind how, if the worst should happen, he might in the most delicate and humane manner break the intelligence to the unhappy lady. But her ear was now terribly acute for any sound, even the slightest, that might convey an intimation of her son's fate or suggest the mode of promptly ascertaining it. Thus, while the housekeeper and the two sisters placed themselves on one side of the surgeon as he stood at the window, he felt a light touch against his arm: he looked round—and there was the mother of the young man who was about to come forth from the Town Hall either a free or a doomed being.

"Signora," said the surgeon, "perhaps if you were to resume your seat, it would be better—and I would give you the first intimation——"

"No—signor; I will remain here!"—and now the lady seemed to be cold and rigid as a marble statue.

Then succeeded an interval of dead silence and awful suspense at that window; and then all of a sudden there was a movement—a slight shock as it were on the part of each, Mrs. De Vere only excepted; and she still remained rigid as a statue. Soldiers were seen coming forth—Ah! just heaven! the young Count is in the midst of

them! The sign was unmistakable:—he had been condemned!

No word—no sound escaped Mrs. De Vere's lips: she turned about with the intention of going forth to see her unfortunate son—to visit him in his dungeon—when nature gave way, and she fell down as if a bullet had passed through her heart.

We must now return to the Princess of Spartivento, whom we left at the moment when, with her veil drawn down, she issued forth from the tribunal after having read the billet which had been placed in her hand. She hastily retraced her way to the hotel where she had taken up her quarters; and on proceeding to her apartment, she found Stefano Vaitura waiting for her.

"Have you received a billet, signora?" he quickly demanded.

"Yes—it is on account of it I am here. The worst is taking place!—and you say in your note that if it be so you have a means of saving his life. For heaven's sake, tell me what you mean? for his doom is sealed so far as the tribunal is concerned!"

"Then your Highness did not happen to notice any of the large placards which have just been posted up in the Great Square and through all the streets?"

"No—I did not linger on the way," responded Bianca. "What are the placards? how do they concern that unfortunate young man?"

"Look, Princess!" said Vaitura: "here is one exactly opposite the hotel. You can read it from the window."

Bianca hurried to the casement; and then she read the placard, which was to the following effect:—that whereas it had been at various times reported in different parts of Italy, as well as in other countries of Europe, that his late Majesty Charles Albert of Sardinia had encouraged the treasonable attempts of Carbonari and other seditious persons; and whereas such rumours had given great cause of distress to his Majesty Victor Emmanuel, the reigning Sovereign of Sardinia; it was determined to make an effort to obtain whatsoever correspondence might be in existence which had tended to furnish slanderous and evil tongues with a seeming foundation for the report that was so propagated. And therefore (the placard went on to say) his Royal Highness the Grand Duke of Tuscany experienced every willingness and anxiety to forward the desire of King Victor Emmanuel to obtain possession of the letters which were alleged to have been written by his deceased father Charles Albert. Therefore, proclamation was made to the effect that whatsoever would surrender up the said correspondence, should receive a certain reward; and if a member of any secret political society, he should be pardoned; and furthermore, if he should be liable for any penalties in consequence of political offences, he should also receive a free pardon, with complete restoration to his civil and political rights, and to the enjoyment of his estates, fortune, or other possessions, that might have been confiscated or forfeited.

Such was the sense of the placard which the Princess of Spartivento read from the hotel window; and an expression of joy appeared upon her countenance.

"You see," said Vaitura, "Victor Emmanuel is

determined to get possession of the correspondence if possible. He knows the importance of it as it affects his father's memory. Mark you how insidiously the placard endeavours to throw discredit on that correspondence—almost to denounce it as a forgery! It is as much as to say, 'The letters never were really written by Charles Albert; but as certain evil-minded and malevolent persons persist in declaring that they were, it would be better for the Piedmontese Government to get hold of them at once, and thus put an end to every shadow of a cause for scandal.'

"Yes, yes! I understand all this!" said the Princess impatiently; "but we will not now enter into political disquisitions. Heaven be thanked, we have the means of saving the life of that young Englishman!"

"Yes—and I also say heaven be thanked!" exclaimed Voitura; "for since your Highness told me that he is innocent of any ill-doing, I have felt as if I were something like a murderer in having helped to betray him into the grasp of justice. Yes—I have loathed myself—it has appeared to me as if I had played the part of a traitorous coward!"

"And now, signor," interrupted the Princess, "we shall both of us have the satisfaction of undoing the evil which we have accomplished. Where is the box containing the correspondence? One of us will speed to the young Englishman and place it in his hands—Or perhaps better still, I will hasten, as if sent direct by him, to General Germin: for I deressay the proceedings of the tribunal are over by this time—"

"Be kind enough to wait for a few minutes, signors," interrupted Voitura, "while I go and seek Raguso and Spezzi. They have the box in their custody. They went out just now for some purpose; but I have no doubt that by this time they have returned."

"Hasten—hasten, signor!" said the Princess. "I long to do a good deed—I who have lately done naught but evil ones!"

These last words were spoken to herself; for the door had already closed behind Signor Voitura, whose footsteps we must now follow.

He proceeded to the apartment where he expected to find Raguso and Spezzi; and these gentlemen were now there. They were examining an iron box, the lid of which they had just closed and which they were locking. A flask of gunpowder lay upon the table.

"My dear friends," cried Voitura, "I am glad that you have returned. I want—"

"One moment! do not be too hasty!" said Raguso. "I deressay we have more important things to tell you than you have to tell us—"

"Ah! important things? What do you mean? and what is that iron box? and what are you doing with gunpowder?"

"Stop! stop!" interjected Raguso, smiling: "you must not ask too many questions at once. In the first place we have found a spot where we can hide for as long as ever we think fit, until the present storm blows over. It is the ruin of an old chateau, about a mile and a half from the city—what is its name, Spezzi?"

"The D'Orco Castle," was the response.

"Ah, to be sure! Well, the herbage and weeds have overgrown the place—it is almost buried in

verdure—just the very spot for persons in our condition to betake themselves unto!"

"Very good," said Voitura. "I am ready to accompany you when we have first accomplished a certain purpose—"

"Ah! my dear friend," interrupted Raguso, "you are always for accomplishing something or another before you look to the main chance!—and in this way you will some day destroy yourself and your friends if you do not mind. It was little short of madness to come to Sienna: but you insisted—and now that we are here, the Princess talks only about saving the life of some one whom she yesterday betrayed! All this is puerile. As for Spezzi and myself, we have made up our minds to depart at once for the D'Orco ruins—"

"Have you seen the new placard, Raguso?" demanded Voitura suddenly.

"Spezzi and I were reading it just before we came in. Ah! they hope to get the correspondence—do they!"

"What made you both go out just now after I had been telling you what the Princess had said to me, and how a fatal error had been committed in giving young Camerino into custody?"

"Oh! our going out," rejoined Raguso, "had nothing to do with that matter. We merely thought it prudent to get a new box for the correspondence instead of the old tin case."

"Ah, I understand," said Voitura: "and this is the new one?" he added, pointing to the iron box which stood upon the table.

"That is the new one," responded Raguso. "It has merits which you little suspect, but which I will quickly explain."

"It is not necessary—unless," added Voitura, "the gunpowder can have anything to do with the mystery."

"It has almost everything to do with it," said Raguso. "Look you, my dear friend! Here is a secret compartment which constitutes a perfect infernal machine. Spezzi and I have just been loading it; and it is very fortunate we have found such a splendid box as this, just at the very instant that the authorities want to get our correspondence from us! No, no! sooner than let them have it we will blow up the documents themselves along with the fellows who may obtain possession of the box!"

"I do not understand how it works—nor do I precisely comprehend your views and objects," said Voitura.

"Look you!" resumed Raguso, locking up the box and placing the key in his pocket: "the coffer is now secured, and the key is here"—tapping the pocket. "Suppose the box were stolen from us by stealth, or that the Tuscan *abirri* were to rush in at this moment and seize it. They should not find the key! I would swallow it sooner! But the box would go to the authorities; and they would attempt to force the lid. Let them do it! Now do you understand me?"

"In plain terms," said Signor Spezzi, "if the box be opened by fair means—that is to say, with the key—it is not dangerous; but if you try to force the lid, it at once becomes an infernal machine."

"But why, my dear friends," asked Voitura, "are you so resolute that Charles Albert's cor-



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correspondence shall never by any possibility of accident find its way into the hands of our enemies? I mean to ask why would you prefer its destruction than that it should be taken from us by force?"

"Because no one chooses to let things be so taken from him," answered Raguso.

"But you know very well," proceeded Voitura, "that we agreed that the correspondence should be given up if its surrender would save the life of any one whose existence we valued."

"To be sure!" said Raguso. "We have not forgotten the fact."

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"And now a life is to be saved!" exclaimed Stefano Voitura. "Need I repeat all that I said to you a couple of hours back after my interview with the Princess?—need I remind you that the death of the young Count would weigh upon my soul like murder?"

"We do not like your young Count," answered Raguso gruffly.

"Believe me, you are labouring under a prejudice!" cried Voitura earnestly.

"He shouted for the republic!" interjected Spezzi; "and we Royalists hate the republic!"

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"Besides," added Raguso, "did he not kill our friend Columella?"

"It was only in self-defence," urged Voitura. "I beheld the transaction. Nothing could be more gallant—nothing could be more justifiable than the Englishman's conduct!"

"By all the saints!" cried Raguso, "this matter may be soon brought to an issue! Here we are, three of us. If two vote that the correspondence is to be given up in order to save De Vere's life, in the name of heaven let it be done. But if on the other hand there is a majority for keeping the correspondence to serve some better purpose, and perhaps some day save a worthier life—then let that be the decision. I for one vote in the latter sense."

"And I also!" ejaculated Spezzi.

"Good! the thing is settled," said Raguso; "and you, Voitura, like a good citizen and faithful brother, must abide by the decision. Spezzi and I are off to the D'Orco ruins at once."

Stefano Voitura was confounded by the decision thus arrived at on the part of his two companions. He did not dare dispute it; for it was one of the fundamental laws of the Secret Society that wherever there were any differences of opinion, the matter at issue should be left to the vote. Not only, therefore, did Voitura find himself compelled to yield to the decision thus rendered—but he dared not re-open the subject or plead any farther on the young Count of Camerino's behalf; and thus he endeavoured to veil his bitter disappointment and grief beneath a look of calmness and self-possession.

"Do you mean to come with us at once, Voitura?" asked Raguso: "or shall you join us presently?"

"I shall join you presently," was the response. "I should like to remain at Siena and learn what has transpired at the trial."

"That is politic enough," interjected Raguso. "Now, friend Spezzi, let us at once make our preparations for departure."

Voitura quitted his two companions, and returned to the apartment of the Princess, who expected to see him enter it with the tin case in his hand. An expression of disappointment flitted over her countenance; as she said, "I suppose they have not returned yet?"

"Yes—they have returned," answered Voitura; "but they will not consent to the salvation of De Vere's life."

"This is abominable! This is infamous!" ejaculated the Princess. "Let me go to them!"

"It is useless, signora," interrupted Stefano. "Your Highness knows Raguso well: he is obstinate as a mule when he has formed a particular opinion. Then, as for Spezzi, he adheres with a marvellous tenacity to all the rules of the Secret Society, and he maintains them with the most scrupulous jealousy. Well then, the matter has just been decided by the vote; and your Highness may therefore guess what chance there is of the decision being revoked or altered."

The Princess threw herself upon a seat; and for some minutes she reflected with a painfulness and a poignancy of feeling which was only too visible upon her countenance. Voitura also gave way to his meditations; and they were almost as distracting as those of Bianca herself.

"If we do not save this young man," exclaimed the Princess, suddenly starting up from her seat, "we shall be murderers, and doubly accused!"

"Wretched woman!" said Voitura, in a menacing voice; "it is you who have implicated me in this atrocity, against which my soul revolts! I would sooner give my own head to the executioner, or stand up before an array of musketeers, than that a hair of the young man's head should be injured!"

"For heaven's sake, do not upbraid me, signor!" said the Princess entreatingly. "God knows I am already miserable enough? What is to be done? Oh, I thought from your billet that you were sure of being enabled to save him—and therefore, as I left the tribunal, I hastily whispered the words, '*There is hope*,' in his ears. —What will he think when he finds this hope unfulfilled? that I have carried my cruelty to the most exquisite degree of refinement—that I am his bitterest enemy—and that my endeavour to speak on his behalf in the presence of his judge, was a mere pretext—an evasion—a subterfuge of some kind or another!"

"I know not what is to be done," said Voitura with a bewildered air: "but by all the saints in the calendar, I swear that I will not desert this young Englishman so long as there shall be a chance of saving him! I will go and ascertain, if possible, when the sentence is to be executed —"

"I heard General Germini proclaim, ere I left the court," said the Princess, "that the execution of the sentence will not take place until to-morrow at daybreak."

"Ah, then we have yet many hours before us!" exclaimed Voitura, the light of hope animating his countenance. "I will go and survey the prison in which he is confined—I will see if by any good chance there should be a member of the Society amongst the gaolers, the soldiers, or the *sbirri* who may have him in their custody —In a word, I will leave no stone unturned that may possibly lead to the result which is now so much to be desired!"

Voitura quitted the room; and the Princess remained alone—or rather, we may say, in the companionship of her painful reflections. Thus upwards of an hour passed, at the expiration of which interval the door opened, and the Countess di Malesco entered the apartment.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE CONVENT.—THE RUINS.

THE Princess started up from her seat, exclaiming, "Lucia! is it possible? Oh, you have not renounced me altogether! You have still some love left for your unhappy sister!"

"I cannot forget that you *are* my sister!" replied the Countess, as she opened her arms to receive the Princess, who precipitated herself into them. "Ah, weep, Bianca! weep!—for you have indeed done an immensity of evil!"

"O God! I know it, Lucia! I know it!" groaned the unhappy woman: "but I am penitent! Never was remorse so sincere!"

"I knew, sister—yes, I knew it!" replied the

Countess: "or else you would not have come to the tribunal to speak on his behalf and endeavour to undo all the mischief you have done. And indeed, if I were not convinced that you now bitterly, bitterly repent the part you have performed, I should not be here! Tell me, Bianca—what was it that you whispered in his ear as you rapidly passed him by?—what meant the billet which was delivered to you? Is there any hope?"

"Oh there was *then*, Lucia!" cried the Princess: "but, alas! now it exists no longer! They were words of hope which I whispered in his ear——"

"And if they be doomed to experience disappointment," interjected Lucia, an expression of perfect agony sweeping over her beautiful countenance, "how terrible for him!—and Oh! how fatal for his unhappy mother!"

"His mother?" echoed the Princess. "Oh, the unfortunate parent!"

"You may well speak of her in these terms, Bianca! She adores her son—she knows him to be innocent of any willing complicity in the conspiracy against Leghorn—I have told her everything——"

"What? you have seen her?" cried the Princess.

"Yes—I saw her just now at the house of General Germini. I was removed thither in a swoon:—the Signora De Vere was there at the same time, and in a similar condition. She knew that her son was condemned to death. I was first brought back to consciousness; and Oh! never, never shall I forget the scene which followed when the unhappy mother herself regained her senses!—Bianca," added Lucia, with an impressiveness that was solemn and even awful to a degree, "if you had witnessed that spectacle, it would have been almost punishment enough for the crime which you committed in betraying the young man into the grasp of the law!"

"Lucia!" exclaimed the Princess, with a wildness in her looks and accents, "I am almost driven to that state of mind in which I feel that I could do something desperate!—as if I could commit another great crime in order to destroy the effects of the one which I first perpetrated! I must save that young man—or I shall go mad! I care not now for the safety of either body or soul, in comparison with the security of that young life which I have so iniquitously jeopardised!"

"O! what avail is this discourse, Bianca," asked the Countess, shaking her head mournfully, "if there be no plan nor project to which you can have recourse for the salvation of the Count?"

"Let us go," cried the Princess, passionately, "and throw ourselves at the feet of General Germini!"

"Useless—utterly useless," said Lucia. "His daughters—two amiable and excellent girls—have already supplicated their father to use his power or influence: but he declared that he could not."

"Have you seen him—I mean my victim," inquired the Princess, rapidly, "since the tribunal broke up?"

"No," answered the Countess. "He was at once conducted away to the military prison; and General Germini issued the strictest orders that no one should be admitted to him, except a priest or clergyman of whatever denomination of religion he himself might be. But when the General

knew that the unfortunate young nobleman's mother had arrived in Sienna, he was constrained to make an exception in her favour. She therefore is now with her son;—and Oh! my very brain reels as I picture to myself what must be the agony of the poor lady as she clasps in her arms that son who she knows must in a few hours be a cold corpse! She must look upon his handsome countenance—and in the depths of her agony she must cry out that it is impossible the life of one so beautiful and so young, so intelligent and so good, can thus be hovering on the very verge of the grave!"

"Do not talk thus, Lucia! do not talk thus!" cried Bianca, with nervous quickness, as she again started up from her seat: "you drive me mad! Oh, that I could save him! Oh, that I could give him back in safety to that mother who is now distractedly straining him to her bosom!"

"What hope had you just now?" inquired the Countess: "and how was it so suddenly dissipated?"

The Princess explained in a few words how Riguso and Spezzi had got possession of the correspondence of the late King of Sardinia—but how they had refused to give it up at the entreaty of Stefano Voitura. Lucia had read the placard which had been so recently posted, and which so intimately regarded that correspondence:—she was therefore terribly afflicted when she learnt that Riguso and Spezzi positively refused to surrender it.

"Leave me now, Lucia!" said her sister: "go and see if you can be of any use to the Signora De Vere, and if by any means you can obtain a knowledge of the prison's internal arrangements through that lady. It may be serviceable—for Voitura is resolved not to abandon every hope until the very last. Tell me that you do not altogether hate me, sister—and then leave me!"

"You are penitent, Bianca—and I cannot hate you," responded the Countess: "God grant that the life of this young man may yet be spared, so that you need not be crushed down to the very earth with shame and remorse, and with a feeling as if——"

"As if I were a murderer!" added Bianca, thus foisting the sentence which her sister dared not complete.

In a few moments the Princess was again alone; but Signor Voitura soon returned—and he informed her that he had been enabled to learn nothing which was in any way hopeful or satisfactory. There was something ominous in his looks; and the Princess, after contemplating him for upwards of a minute, said, "I am convinced that you have thoughts floating in your mind which you hesitate to reveal?"

"Yes, yes!" interrupted Stefano, speaking quickly and nervously; "a demon is struggling to get possession of my soul!"

"What mean you?"—and the Princess gazed with a species of consternation upon the young man, for she feared lest he were going mad.

"Do not question me! do not question me!" he said. "If I once give utterance to my thoughts—aye, if I once allow them to assume shape and substance, I shall be lost—I feel that I shall be lost!"

"Stefano Voitura," said the Princess, "if there

be a means of saving this young man, I adjure you to explain yourself!"

"I have committed one crime in helping to betray him—though heaven knows I fancied I was doing my duty at the moment—Nevertheless, it was a crime on my part!—and now perhaps it may need another crime to remedy the evil accomplished by the first!"

"And by heaven," exclaimed the Princess vehemently, "you must commit this second crime! 'Tis strange, but you are speaking in language similar to that which I adopted just now when my sister was here—for she has been—and she spoke to me of the presence of the young victim's mother at Sinna—"

"I have heard of it!" interrupted Voiture. "I cannot endure the idea of all this misery which has been brought about by you alone! No!—and therefore these evil thoughts which are haunting me—which would urge me on to become a traitor to my brethren—perhaps lead on to deeds of blood and violence—who can tell?"

"What do you mean, Stefano?" cried the Princess: "for heaven's sake tell me what you mean!"

"If there is a crime to be committed," said Voiture, with a dark and ominous expression of countenance, "it is for you to share it with me! Yes—even though it were not as a matter of necessity that you should assist me, yet as a punishment for your wickedness towards the unfortunate Charles De Vere—your guilt in rendering me likewise a criminal towards him——"

"Spare me all these bitter taunts and cutting reproaches!" interrupted the Princess; "and tell me what to do! Oh, I feel as if I could wade knee-deep through blood if it were to clear the path of those who seek the life of this unfortunate and innocent young man!"

"I know not how it may issue," responded Voiture gloomily; "but that blood may be spilt is probable enough. Do you not understand me? The correspondence of Charles Albert is in the hands of Raguso and Spezzi—and they expect me presently in the ruins of Castle D'Orco, a mile and a half from the city."

The Princess gazed earnestly and inquiringly upon Voiture's countenance for more than a minute, in order to read in its lineaments whether she was rightly fathoming the purpose of his sent; and then she said in a low tone, "You would betray them into the hands of justice? you would make me give the requisite information? perhaps you would wish me to lead the *sbirri* to their place of concealment? I will do it, Stefano—I will do it! Then the correspondence will fall into our hands——"

"This is not my plan!" interrupted Voiture. "You must know that Raguso and Spezzi have taken such precautions that if the box containing the letters be stolen or wrested from them, and if a violent attempt be made to open it, it will explode, and not merely consume the documents themselves, but likewise deal destruction around upon whosoever may be within the reach of the infernal missiles. Nor is this all," proceeded Voiture: "but if you and I were to join in a deadly struggle with those two men for the purpose of possessing ourselves of the box, they might cause it to explode—and then there would be destruction

for us all four!—destruction of the correspondence!—aye, and destruction therefore to the last hope of saving the young Count of Camerino!"

"Then what other plan do you propose?" asked the Princess: and she trembled with suspense.

Voiture hesitated for some minutes to explain himself farther: he became violently agitated—he paced to and fro in the apartment with hurried and uneven steps; but at length he abruptly stopped short, as curtly ejaculating, "By heaven, it shall be done!"

"Oh, yes—let it be done!" cried the Princess; "whatever you have in your mind which you think will save the life of that young man!"

"Heaven is my witness," resumed Voiture, "that I appealed most earnestly and imploringly to Raguso and Spezzi to give up the correspondence for a purpose of justice and humanity—and they refused! Their conduct was unjust and inhuman. Ought I now to take into consideration the young man who has been condemned to die for the faults of others—or these two men who have selfishly closed their hearts against him?"

"Oh, you must decide in favour of the cause of justice and humanity!" exclaimed the Princess.

"And I do thus decide!" rejoined Voiture. "Now, Princess," he continued, addressing her in a resolute and even stern tone, "the moment the dusk sets in you will prepare to accompany me. It is possible that murder's work may be done!—aye, probable that your hands and mine will be imbrued with the blood of those two men! If therefore you require leisure to pray—or to make arrangements for prompt flight—or for taking refuge in a convent—In short, signora, as you and I must presently enter upon a desperate path, you may perhaps have certain preparations to make. I leave you therefore until the dusk closes in, and then I shall return."

Having thus spoken, Voiture abruptly quitted the apartment: and as the door closed behind him, the Princess gave vent to a cry of exultation, adding in ferrid tones, "After all, he will be saved! he will be saved!"

About a quarter of an hour afterwards the Princess of Spartivento, closely veiled, issued forth from the hotel and inquired her way towards the convent of La Trinita. This establishment was situated in one of the suburbs: the building was spacious, and stood in the midst of grounds surrounded by a very high wall. In the immediate neighbourhood was the church of the same name, and the priests of which acted as father confessors to the nuns of the monastic institution.

The Princess rang the bell at the gate of the convent; and the summons was presently answered by an elderly female, wearing the common garb of a Poor Sister of the establishment. The Princess inquired if she could be permitted to see the Lady Abbess.

"You must raise your veil," said the Poor Sister: and when the Princess had complied with the instruction, the old woman scrutinized her countenance earnestly for nearly a minute. At length she seemed to be perfectly convinced that it was not one of the sterner sex who was endeavouring to obtain admission into the sacred precincts in female disguise; and she said, "Walk in, I will convey your message to the Lady Abbess."

The Princess was conducted into a very plainly-furnished parlour, at the extremity of which there was a sort of grating, whereat visitors conversed with those friends or relations who having taken the extremest and most rigorous vows of separation from the world, could only be permitted to hold occasional intercourse with any of its denizens from the other side of that iron trellis.

The Princess was not long kept waiting: the door presently opened, and the Abbess made her appearance. She was an elderly lady—tall and thin—and her very pale face looked almost corpse-like surrounded as it was with the folds of the whitest and finest linen, which seemed to be a shroud. The expression of that face was perfectly serene: and it retained the traces of some beauty which in former years it must have possessed. On perceiving that the visitress was a complete stranger to her—and also observing at a glance that she was a lady of the most distinguished appearance, notwithstanding that she was dressed in plain mourning garments—the Abbess requested her to be seated; and then in silence awaited whatsoever explanations might be given to account for her presence. Nevertheless the holy dame bent a benignant look upon Bianca, as if she almost penetrated her thoughts, and was thus encouraging her to enter into the bosom of that peaceful seclusion.

"I scarcely know how to open my purpose to your ladyship," began the Princess, in a hesitating and faltering voice: "indeed I now feel diffident to a degree—it seems as if I were about to ask a boon of such magnitude that it is certain to be refused—"

"Speak, daughter," said the Abbess, at once addressing Bianca with a species of maternal benevolence that was even more encouraging than her looks had previously been. "What boon is this that you would ask me? Your appearance—your manners—all indicate that you are incapable of saying aught to which I may not listen. Let me hope that it is on your soul's behalf you have found your way within these walls?"

"It is on my soul's behalf," replied the Princess. "I would fain abandon a world of whose turmoil and strife I am weary; and I could lay down my head to rest upon the humblest pallet in any of your convent-cells!"

"You will be received amongst us," answered the Abbess, "with open arms. To any one who seeks this conventual pile in such a spirit as that which has impelled your footsteps hither, shall the welcome of a holy fervour be accorded."

"I already long," answered Bianca, "to see that door,"—and she glanced towards the portal at the entrance, for the door leading from the parlour into the vestibule stood open—"I long to see that portal closed for ever betwixt me and the great world without!"

"Daughter," asked the Abbess, "is it sorrow or is it sin which has impelled you hither, and which now elicits such words from your lips?"

"Both, holy mother," was the response: "but truth compels me to add that my sorrows proceeded from my sins."

"You shall confess your sins—and if penitence be displayed, there shall be absolution granted."

"I have borne—I still bear," continued Bianca, "a great name in the world: I am of princely

rank—and my riches are great. All this wealth will I give as an endowment to religious institutions; but when once I enter into your community, holy mother, I would fain that the name which I bore in the world should rest unknown amidst the sisterhood."

"Unknown," rejoined the Abbess, "unto every one except myself and the father confessor. When will you come amongst us, daughter? Delay not, I conjure you!"

"I shall not delay, holy mother. Would to heaven that I could remain here now, and not be compelled to go forth again!"

"What?" asked the Abbess, severely: "have you still to do with a world whence you are now expressed yourself so anxious to fly? Have you not yet committed enough of its sins to endure a proportionate amount of its sorrows?"

"Oh, yes," responded the Princess: "I have already seen too much, and my heart is scared as it were with the hot iron of affliction! But still I cannot leave that world all in a moment—I have others to think of—duties to perform—interests which cannot be neglected—"

"Daughter, you are right," said the Abbess, her countenance speedily recovering its benignity: "leave no duties unperformed—and then you will have naught to excite your regrets when once these portals shall have closed upon you for ever. Let it therefore be an understanding that at any moment when you knock it shall be opened unto you: and then may you enter upon a life of peace and serene bliss such as you have never known and never could know in the great world which you are quitting!"

"Within a very few hours, holy mother," said the Princess, "I shall return to kneel at your feet and crave your blessing."

"I will bestow it now," said the Abbess.

"No, no!" ejaculated Bianca, with a shudder that was almost visible: "it would seem as if I were passing from the midst of sacred things into the vortex of those which are profane and impious, if I were to receive your blessing now, and then go forth into the great world again! You shall bless me when I return, and when I throw myself at your feet and for the future invoke your guidance, as a child may kneel in the presence of its mother!"

"And again I assure you, daughter, of a sincere welcome. The name which you bore in the world shall be lost in the humble and simple one which you will assume the very instant you return within these precincts."

"And let that name be one," cried the Princess, "which shall remind me that I have been sinful and that I have endured mental agonies on account of my misdeeds! Let it be a name to bear which shall be in itself a species of penance! Tell me, holy mother—is there such a name as this which you can bestow upon me?"

"There is," answered the Abbess, after a few moments' reflection. "When you return into my presence and kneel at my feet to invoke my blessing, I shall raise you up and say, 'Welcome, poor sinner! welcome, thou penitent to this abode of peace! Be thou welcome, Sister Agonia!'"

The Princess bowed her head for a few moments: then suddenly drawing the veil over her face, she murmured, "Thanks, holy mother!"

thanks! I shall soon return to claim your maternal care!"

She then issued from the convent: but before she returned to the hotel, she walked for a long time in a lonely part of the suburbs of Sienna, communing with herself, and pondering the various circumstances which now environed her.

When she retraced her steps to the hotel, she found her sister anxiously awaiting her arrival.

"What tidings, Lucia?" the Princess at once asked.

"None," replied the Countess. "I have not been permitted to penetrate into the prison; and the poor mother still remains there. She will not for a moment separate herself from her beloved son! What tidings have you?"

Bianca reflected for a few moments; and then she said, "I do not like to tell you that there is a hope, because once before I was deceived: but—but—"

"Heaven be thanked!" gasped Lucia: "there is a hope! I see that is your meaning! But what—"

"Ask me no further questions," interjected Bianca. "Believe, however, that everything which can be done—"

"Oh, sister! you will save him!" murmured Lucia, trembling with suspense.

"Yes—I think, Lucia—I think that I may promise—But do not question me."

"Is there any danger that I can share?" asked the Countess eagerly.

"None, none," responded her sister: and then she murmured to herself, "The first crime was all my own!—the second shall be mine likewise!"

"What do you say, sister?" asked the Countess.

"Nothing, Lucia—nothing—Only that there is naught wherein you can lend your succour. But Ah! you will be full of suspense! Come to me here at midnight. At midnight precisely!"

"At midnight precisely!" cried the Countess. "Then heaven grant," she added, with a most ferid emphasis, "that you may have joyous tidings to impart!"

Lucia then took a temporary leave of her sister; and in a short time Stefano Voitura reappeared in the presence of the Princess. The glance which she flung upon him was rapid and searching: it was to estimate whether he had in any sense altered his mind, or whether he was still bent upon saving at any sacrifice the life of the young Count of Camerino. The look was satisfactory; for there was every indication of a fixed purpose in the lineaments of her companion.

"I am ready, signora," he said. "Is your Highness prepared to go with me?"

"I am ready," she responded.

Five minutes afterwards they issued forth from the hotel,—the Princess having her veil drawn over her countenance, and Voitura being muffled in a cloak the collar of which came high up on his face, while a clouching hat shaded the upper part of his countenance. They proceeded in total silence until they were beyond the outskirts of Sienna; and then the Princess said, "You must remember, signor, that I am as yet ignorant of the details of the project which you have doubtless settled in your mind?"

"True!" said Stefano: then after a few moments' reflection, he went on to observe, "God

forefend that we should spill blood unnecessarily, or take the lives of our two friends unless under circumstances of the most urgent pressure! In one word, signora, we will endeavour to effect our aim while they sleep. Put if—but if"—and Stefano repeated the words with a certain ominous misgiving in his accents,—“but if we find it impossible to effect our purpose without the extreme measures—why, in that case, alas! such is the position of affairs that there must be no hanging back!”

"No," said Bianca: "there must be no hanging back!"

"I need not ask your Highness," resumed Voitura, "whether you have the nerve and energy to use the weapons which I am about to offer you? The hand which dealt a righteous punishment upon the villainous spy at Turin, will not now quail or tremble when so much may depend upon its steadiness!"

"With what weapons am I to arm myself?" inquired the Princess.

"Behold!" responded Stefano; "here is a poniard to use if at close quarters—and here is a pistol with two barrels. Be cautious! the pistol is loaded. Secure the weapons about your person; and when we join our comrades amongst the ruins, be careful to observe well my proceedings, and do not for a single instant suffer your attention to be abstracted by any other incident."

"Tust to me," answered the Princess.

She and Voitura now pursued their way in silence. The evening was gloomy; and if Voitura had not previously taken care to make himself well acquainted with the exact route to be pursued, they might have found some little difficulty in taking the proper path. At length Voitura said, "We must now be approaching the spot—and somewhere here-about there ought to be a rivulet with a bridge."

Scarcely had they proceeded half-a-dozen more paces, when they perceived the stream: the wooden bridge was crossed—and a little farther ahead they plunged into a grove. Here utter darkness prevailed: but the Princess managed to keep close behind Voitura, who said to her, "All we have to do is to push straight forward amidst these trees, and we cannot go wrong."

In a very few minutes they emerged upon an open space, which had once been a well-kept lawn at the bottom of an exquisitely laid-out flower-garden: but some years had elapsed since any attention had been bestowed on the place, so that it was overrun with weeds and was fast becoming a wilderness of spontaneous vegetation. At the farther extremity the ruins might now be discerned,—a black shape looming amidst the darkness: and thitherward Voitura and the Princess proceeded.

On reaching the spot where a proud castellated edifice had once reared itself, but where naught save mouldering ruins now remained, Voitura and the Princess penetrated into the midst of the skeleton edifice; and presently they caught a glimpse of a gleam of light which appeared to come from out of the earth at a little distance. They approached, and found that there was a flight of stone steps leading down into what had once been the cellar of Castle D'Oro; and it was from this depth that the light emanated. There,

under the half-exposed archway of a cellar, sat Raguso and Spezzi,—their countenances being relieved by the light of a lantern which stood between them on the ground.

"Ah! who comes?" they both ejaculated, almost simultaneously, as the sounds of footsteps reached their ears; and springing to their feet, they at once produced their pistols, which they pointed up towards the aperture.

"Friends!" replied Stefano; and then he emphatically added, "*Carlo Alberto's letters!*" This being the watch-word agreed upon amongst the friends for the insurance of their safety in the present perilous position of affairs.

"Ah, Voitura?" said Raguso, dropping the muzzle of his pistol. "But whom have you in your company?"

"One whom you will rejoice to hail in the sphere of renewed activity," responded Voitura, as he pressed his arm to assist the Princess to descend the steps.

"Ah! her Highness?" cried Spezzi. "Welcome, signora!"

"I require no aid to surmount the difficulties of this descent," she said to Voitura, from whose speech to the two others she at once took the cue of the part which she had to perform. "I feel not now as a lady requiring courteous attentions and delicate ministrations—but as a woman who remembers what she was at the Spaurivento Palace, and who is prepared for every hardship or peril, difficulty or danger, no matter how great or how severe, so long as there be a chance of adopting fresh measures in the interest of the good cause."

"By all the saints," ejaculated Raguso, "it is refreshing to hear such language as this! Welcome, Princess! You were ever one to whom we all looked up as a leader—for we love heroines as well as heroes; and doubtless the time will soon return when we shall again be assembled with numbers of our friends in solemn conclave, to discuss the fate of Italy."

Voitura and the Princess had by this time descended the steps; and the entire party of four persons were soon seated together under the arch.

"What news in Sienna?" asked Raguso.

"Nothing worthy of mention," replied Voitura, "has occurred since the condemnation of young Camerino to death—unless it be that I have had the honour of a long conference with her Highness, and we have come to the conclusion that ye two, my friends, may have been right, after all, in declining to give up the correspondence of Charles Albert."

"Yes," added the Princess; "on dispassionately envisaging the matter, I could not blame you."

"I am glad to receive these assurances," exclaimed Raguso. "If the young Count had been a true friend to the cause, heaven knows how ready we should have felt to save his life! But as matters stand, what object have we—"

"None!" answered Voitura. "This is certainly the fact."

"Ah! you have found it out when the momentary enthusiasm of your false generosity has subsided!" observed Raguso, with a smile. "The young Count was not with us—and consequently he would have been against us. He would not have

employed for the true advancement of Italian interests the immense fortune which the late Count bequeathed unto him! He would not have permitted the brethren to hold their secret conclaves in the subterranean of his country-mansion!—but, on the contrary, he suffered the secret of those places to be revealed to the *sbirri* when La Dolfina was given up to justice. For who but he could have prompted your Highness' sister to denounce the bidding-place of the old woman? However, to be brief, there was no single circumstance which served to plead with me on that young man's behalf."

"Nor with me," added Spezzi.

"And now," said Voitura, "let us depart from that topic. Even if there were a momentary misunderstanding on the point, it is all settled and arranged—"

"And I must observe," interjected Raguso, "that you, my dear Voitura, acted as a good member of the brotherhood and as a straightforward consistent liberal, when you yielded without another syllable of remonstrance to the decision unto which Signor Spezzi and myself deemed it expedient to arrive."

"I need hardly assure you," said Voitura, "that the moment I represented to the Princess the decision to which yourself and Spezzi had come, she at once bowed to it;—and then it was that on calmer discussion, we were almost compelled to arrive at the conviction that you had reason on your side."

"Who can tell," exclaimed Spezzi, "of what importance the fact of possessing these documents may prove?—of infinitely greater benefit to the good cause than the saving of a comparatively worthless life! And now tell us—did anything particular transpire during the trial?"

"Nothing except those particulars which were known to you before you took your departure from the hotel in Sienna."

"Doubtless the authorities," said Raguso, "will endeavour to obtain from young Camerino a list of the names of all who served in the late enterprise, together with descriptions of their persons?"

"No doubt of it," said Voitura; "and therefore it will be expedient for us to remain secreted here until after the execution to-morrow, when we shall be enabled to learn precisely to what extent the young Count will have compromised us, or whether he have done so at all."

"And your sister, signora?" said Raguso, addressing the Princess: "may I venture to ask if there be any hope that the Countess di Milazzo will return to the allegiance of that good cause from which, as we learnt through Voitura, she was seduced away by the wiles and caresses of the young Englishman?"

"Do not speak to her Highness concerning her sister!" said Voitura, in a solemn tone. "You may suppose how painful it was for her Highness to be compelled by a sense of duty to surrender up her sister to the grasp of the law,—or at least to determine upon so surrendering her—for of course her Highness could not have foreseen that the Countess was prepared with the means of saving herself."

"I love the good cause," said the Princess, "better than everything else in the world. I do

not forget my oath; and even the tenderest feelings of kinship and the closest ties dwindle into naught when compared with the sense of all the patriotic devotion I owe to my native land."

"And you see, my friends," said Stefano Voitura, "that it is not by mere words her Highness proves this devotedness on her part. She was just now beyond all danger—she was exempt from all the consequences of past incidents—she might have returned to Sardinia, to occupy once more her splendid palace at Turin, and plunge into all the pleasures which her vast fortune would enable her to enjoy. But no! Her Highness comes amongst us again!—she takes the step which once more imperils her!—she is again in league with conspirators, as the tyrants dare to designate us!"

"You say on many kind things concerning me," remarked the Princess, with a smile, "that I shall begin to wonder by what possible means I may justify all these compliments. But why am I now amongst you once more? It is that we may consult upon the plans which ought next to be adopted."

Having thus so far succeeded in giving to the discourse that gloss which entirely suited their own views, Stefano Voitura and the Princess proceeded to deliberate with Raguso and Spezzi in a manner which seemed to proclaim them to be devoted heart and soul to the grand object as heretofore. Time passed on; and when the conversation began to exhaust its most serious topics, Raguso proposed that they should sup.

"The offer will be agreeable enough, if you possess the materials," answered Voitura. "I was thinking, as I came hither with her Highness, whether you had been careful to make provision of this nature—or whether you in any way relied upon me?"

"We did not rely upon you," answered Raguso, "because you did not specify the hour at which we might expect you. We therefore took care of ourselves—as Spezzi will full soon proceed to convince you."

Thus speaking, he turned the lantern in a particular direction; and Spezzi, penetrating farther into the vault, produced from a niche—or rather from a hollow place formed by the falling away of some of the brickwork—a small leathern portmanteau, or *bavarezek*, of the description and dimensions such as pedestrian tourists on the Continent are frequently in the habit of using. It contained changes of linen and toilet necessities in one compartment; but from another certain comestibles were forthcoming, in the shape of a meat-pie, some biscuits, dried fruits, a flask of spirits, and another of wine.

"You have indeed taken care to provision the garrioon," said Voitura. "I confess that when you first mentioned the name of supper, I flung a glance around the cheerless place, wondering whether you were in jest—and if not, whence the provender was to display itself."

"Well, you see, my friend," answered Raguso, "even a miserable half-exposed cellar like this has its conveniences when persons choose to look out for them. At the extremity—where the vault is perfectly free from damp—there is a bed of dried leaves; for Spezzi and I were not idle during the hours that we were alone together.

Presently we will spread our mantles; and her Highness may repose herself in such comfort as these preparations can afford, and in such security as the arms of three determined men may be enabled to guarantee."

"And now I bethink me," said Voitura, "where have you disposed of the casket—the iron box I mean—containing those valuable letters?"

"I will show you," answered Raguso; and taking up the lantern, he displayed a little niche which he himself had just now made in the wall, by removing a portion of the masonry.

It was at a height of about a couple of feet from the floor of the cellar; and as Raguso, while seated on the ground, had been resting his back against the wall, his shoulders concealed that place wherein the casket was deposited.

"If we sleep at all to-night," he said, "I shall slumber in the same position in which I have been sitting. The slightest touch will in that case awaken me;—and thus if you, my friends, were to sink into the profoundest slumber, no one could stealthily carry off that box—supposing, I mean, that any lurking thief found his way hither, with a certain foreknowledge and a particular intent in his mind."

"Oh, but we will take our turns," said Voitura, "in keeping watch throughout the night."

The little party now addressed themselves to the provender that was furnished for the supper; and Voitura purposely suggested that the flask of wine should be left for the exclusive use of the Princess. The proposal was as a matter of course immediately assented to by Raguso and Spezzi—to whom Voitura took care to leave the flask of spirits; for on each occasion when he applied it to his lips, he merely pretended to drink, but did not in reality suffer a drop to pass down his throat. We should add that both himself and the Princess continued to talk in a strain consistent with the idea of the most uncompromising devotion towards "the good cause."

Soon after the supper was disposed of, Voitura, addressing himself to the Princess, said, "You will perhaps do well, signora, to lie down and take a little rest: for it is impossible to foresee what fatigues may await us for the morrow."

The Princess comprehended that Stefano must have a motive for the suggestion; and she therefore replied, "I will follow your well-meant counsel."

"Let me give your Highness my cloak," Voitura hastened to observe. "Here! this way, signora!"

"Light them with the lantern, Spezzi," said Raguso.

"Here is indeed a pile of leaves!" exclaimed Voitura; then the next moment he whispered in Bianca's ear, "Watch well! If the worst ensue, Spezzi will be your opponent!—Here is the cloak, signora," he at once added audibly.

The Princess received the mantle, which she threw upon the bed of leaves; while Voitura and Spezzi returned with the lantern towards the entrance of the vault.

"And now," said Voitura, "if ye, my friends, seem inclined to slumber, I will take the first turn as sentinel."

"I know not how it is," said Signor Spezzi; "but whether I took more than my share of the



spirits, or whether the alcohol was more than ordinarily potent—but certain it is that I experienced an inclination to sleep;—and giving my assent to Voitura's proposition, I shall court repose."

Wrapping himself in his cloak, he lay down in the vault; while Raguso settled his own person in a sitting posture, leaning his back against the wall, and the cape of his cloak coming over his head, which rested upon the lid of the box placed in the recess.

"Take you the first watch, Voitura," he said; "and I will relieve you at the end of a couple of hours. Rest assured that at the expiration of that time I shall start up broad awake and completely refreshed. For to tell you the truth, I also think that I took more than my due share of the potent contents of that flask."

Silence now prevailed. Voitura stood at the entrance of the vault; a little way in, on the left

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hand side, was Raguso: still further in, on the right hand, was Sprzzi;—and at the extremity, some twelve or fifteen yards off, was the Princess. Voitura placed himself in such a position that by the light of the lantern he could command a view of the countenances of his male companions; but he so settled his own features as to appear as if he were lost in thought. For he saw that notwithstanding his alleged somnolence, Raguso was not immediately closing his eyes—though on the other hand Sprzzi had almost immediately sunk off into a profound slumber.

"Does he suspect anything? is he watching me?" asked Voitura of himself. "If so, were it not better to throw off the mask at once and make the attack? I might even shoot him as he sits half-reclining there! But no!—I should not think of killing him like a dog—unless as a last resource!"

At the expiration of a few minutes Raguso's

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eyes began to close; then they opened again; and after a little while, he said, "Perdition take it, Voitura!—but I do not like to go to sleep! I have a presentiment of some evil!"

"Indeed?" said Stefano. "Do you dread an interruption of the Siennese *abbissi*? If so, shall we extinguish the light?"

"No," responded Raguso. "In case of danger we must see who our enemies are, and the best mode of dealing with them. I dreads it is all a stupid fancy on my part."

"Yes: and you should conquer it," rejoined Voitura. "I will be vigilant—my ears and my eyes are sharp—"

"Good!" said Raguso. "I will endeavour to sleep."

He again closed his eyes; and Voitura thought within himself, "He has a presentiment, but it points not to me! He suspects me not!"

In a few minutes he felt convinced that Raguso slept—but not for nearly half-an-hour did he move from the spot where he had planted himself:—he watched the countenances of his two male companions. At length he thought that the time for action had arrived. He stole towards the niche where the portmanteau was deposited; and he took out of it one of the flasks—at the same time dexterously slipping off the leathern strap by which the baverack itself might be along over the shoulder. He concealed the strap under his coat: but the flask he kept in his hand, and applied to his lips, so that if Raguso should happen to open his eyes, he might fancy that the portmanteau had merely been visited for the sake of the flask. Raguso's eyes however continued closed: and Voitura thought to himself, "He is not so ready in awakening as he flattered himself that he should be! He doubtless drank too much of the strong spirit!"

Voitura now proceeded to get the strap into such order that, by the aid of the buckle, it served as a running noose. His back was turned towards Raguso during the few moments that he was thus occupied; and when he looked towards him again, he felt certain that he still slept.

The moment for action was now come; and Voitura made a significant gesture; for though he could not see the Princess in the darkness of the cavern's extremity, he knew full well she on the other hand might watch all his proceedings, as he stood within the range of the lantern's beams. It struck him that the significant gesture he had just given, was acknowledged by a slight rustling of the dried leaves at the end of the vault. Slowly and cautiously he shifted his position in such a way as to bring himself nearer to Raguso, who was sleeping with his two hands joined together and resting upon his lap. Quick as the eye can wink, Stefano Voitura threw the noose of the strap over the two hands—pulled it tight—and at the same instant flung himself upon Raguso in such a way that his knee rested against his chest—and the man was powerless.

"Villain!" he exclaimed, his eyes literally flaming as they opened up into Voitura's countenance.

"What's that?—so alarm!" exclaimed Spizzi, starting up to his feet.

"Dre out to lay a hand upon a pistol," vociferated Voitura, "or you are a dead man!"—and

he was now leveling his own pistol at him, while holding Raguso powerless in the manner already described.

"You must surrender!" said the voice of the Princess, now speaking in Spizzi's ear; and the point of a poniard simultaneously pricked his throat.

"Coward!" exclaimed Raguso, seeing that Spizzi was so utterly dismayed and bewildered that he seemed as if his very senses had abandoned him.

"Si enee!—or I'll blow your brains out!" and the muzzle of Voitura's pistol was now applied to the brow of the prostrate Raguso. "Princess, look to your man!"

"Perdition!" suddenly ejaculated Spizzi: and springing back, he drew a pistol from the breast of his coat; but the next instant the arm which held it was struck upwards—the pistol exploded—and Bianco's poniard was stricken deep down into the heart of her antagonist.

At that very same moment Raguso, with one stupendous effort, accompanied with a yell of fierce vindictive hate, hurled Voitura away from him, even at the risk of the pistol that was held against his brow sending its contents into his brain. Another instant—aye, even in the twinkling of an eye, Raguso burst the leathern strap which confined his wrist; and seizing the pistol from Voitura's grasp, he dealt him one terrific blow with the butt-end upon the skull, which crashed audibly and fearfully, the sound mingling with the last moan of the victim. But everything was now taking place with lightning rapidity, and one tragedy was followed by another almost as quickly as thought succeeds thought in the human brain. For down came the blood-stained poniard grasped by the Princess!—down it came, that weapon which had just drunk the life-blood of Spizzi!—and deep it plunged into the back of Raguso. Precisely between the shoulders penetrated the dagger, to which a horrible sense of danger and desperation imparted a tremendous impetus; and it was also with a single moan, as in the case of Voitura an instant before, that Raguso rolled over, a corpse!

And now all was accomplished!—and the Princess remained the victress on that hideous arena of battle. Three corpses lay at her feet: two had fallen beneath the dagger which she herself wielded—and the third had parted from life in a cause that had taken its origin in her own misdeeds. There—in that lonely spot, amidst the grove embowered ruins of the ancient castle, in a vault which might have served as a sepulchre—stood that woman whose soul had already been stained with crimes, but who now had added dark treacheries and foul murders to her preceding iniquities! For a few moments it seemed too as if she had just awakened from the midst of a hideous and appalling dream: but not long did she remain transfixed there, with all the purposes of her mind wrapped up in the spectacle whereon her looks were riveted. She remembered what there was to be done! First of all, stooping down, she felt in Raguso's pockets, and speedily found the key belonging to the iron box. This she opened; and thence she took forth the correspondence to obtain which all the details of the recent tragedy had been enacted. It was however with mingled caution, calculation, and terror, that Bianca

meddled with the casket, for she had not forgotten that it was so fashioned as to constitute under certain circumstances an infernal machine. However, it was in safety that she conducted her proceedings; and having secured the packet of letters, she stooped down for a moment to ascertain whether the spark of life might possibly scintillate still in the heart of either of the three individuals that lay at her feet. But there could be no possibility of doubt as to the fact that their souls had taken wing; and Bianca, having extinguished the lantern, began to take her way with all possible rapidity back to Sienna.

There was now a wild joy in her heart—a strange feverish enthusiasm—a feeling as if she had accomplished some praiseworthy deed of self-martyrdom, or had made some stupendous personal sacrifice in order to save the life which her own wickedness had in the first instance placed in such fearful jeopardy. She thought not now of the fearful crimes that had just been perpetrated in order to carry out her views: she was not haunted by the spectres of those *three* persons whose lives had been sacrificed in order that the life of *one* might be saved! In about twenty minutes she reached the city, towards which she was guided by the shining lights; for otherwise she might have lost her way after emerging from the grove in the midst of which the ruins of the Castle D'Oro were situated.

The Princess proceeded straight to the hotel where she had taken up her quarters; and on gaining the apartment, she drank a large draught of water. There was wine upon the table; but she would not touch it. It was now close upon midnight; and Bianca remembered the appointment which she had given to her sister. Taking a sheet of paper, she enclosed the packet of letters therein: she carefully sealed the envelope and she addressed the packet thus: "To his Excellency General Germini, from the Count of Camerino."

No sooner was this done, when Lucia—tall of the most painful anxiety, and consequently before her time by several minutes—made her appearance.

"What tidings, sister?" she demanded, as she rushed into the apartment.

"He is saved, Lucia!" responded the Princess.

"Saved! saved!" cried the Countess: and then springing towards Bianca, she flung her arms about her neck, exclaiming, "Oh, heaven will bless you! heaven will bless you, my sister!—and all the mischief you have previously done is amply atoned for! But how is he saved?"

"This packet contains the correspondence of Carlo Alberto, the late King of Piedmont, with the chiefs of the Secret Societies; and on giving this up to the Commandant the young Englishman may claim his life."

An exclamation of joy burst from the lips of Lucia: but all in a moment a change came over her—a ghastly pallor seized upon her countenance—and she staggered back as if reeling in dread horror from some spectacle that afflicted her.

"Good heavens! what is it?" cried the Princess.

"Blood! blood!"—and Lucia pointed in increasing horror to her sister's garments.

"Aye, blood! blood! to be sure!"—and the Princess laughed with scornful wildness. "And

why not? To avert the consequences of this one crime I was prepared to commit a thousand! Sooner than have the innocent blood of that young man upon my head, I was ready to wade knee-deep through the blood of those members of the Secret Society who had compelled him to remain in their midst!"

"My God! what have you done, Bianca?" murmured the Countess, who tottered to a chair, and felt as if she were about to faint.

"No matter what I have done," replied the Princess, almost fiercely. "Suffice it for you to know, sister, that these documents have been purchased with blood! And now let there be no loss of time in using them on behalf of him whom they are to save from death! It was a satisfaction that I had promised myself,—the last, last pleasure which on earth I may know: but I feel that I am not equal to the task! There is blood upon my garments!—the General might see the tell tale stains!—and Charles himself might recoil in horror from the idea of using a talisman of safety when presented to him by the red right hand of Murder! Go you, Lucia!—go, and convey the packet to the Governor and the tidings of freedom to the young Englishman! You deserve to become the messenger of such good tidings! Yes—for you have maintained the purity of your soul and the integrity of your reputation throughout this terrible series of incidents wherein my own happiness and fame have been engulfed as in a whirlpool! Go you, therefore, my sister! But suffer Charles to know that I had at least some share in accomplishing his salvation!"

"He shall know that you have done it all, Bianca!" exclaimed the Countess, with a momentary fervour: and then in a tone that suddenly changed to sadness, she added, "But he shall not learn that you have plunged still more deeply into crime on his account!"

"I leave it all to your discretion, Lucia," responded the Princess. "And now go! But return to me as soon as you have accomplished your mission: for I have something of importance to make known unto you."

The Countess di Milazzo departed. She was absent a little short of an hour; and on her return to the hotel she threw herself into Bianca's arms, proclaiming the result of her visit to the prison. She likewise entered into details of what had there occurred: but inasmuch as we shall presently have to record them in their proper place, we will pass them over altogether now.

Lucia found her sister attired in another dress; and there was a bundle lying upon a chair.

"Now, come with me," said Bianca, when Lucia had given her explanations.

"Whether are you going, sister?" asked the Countess. "At this time of night—indeed it is past one in the morning!—and it must seem so strange at the hotel that there should be these outgoings and incomings!"

"You are above public opinion, dear sister," interrupted Bianca, "and I am beneath it. You are too high placed upon the pedestal of your own character for calumny to reach you; and I am so utterly debased and degraded that no additional weight of opprobrium can crush me down lower than I am. But come, sister!"—and, taking up the bundle, the Princess concealed it beneath

her cloak as she led the way from the apartment.

"Whither are you going?" again asked the Countess, full of an intense anxiety. "You just now spoke with a mingled despondency and bitterness in reference to your degraded position——"

"And I am about to take the only step, Lucia, which can possibly be adopted by one in my position."

"Holy saints! what mean you, sister—dear sister! do you—do you dare to think of suicide?"

"No, Lucia!—or else I should not have thought it worth while to bring these blood-stained garments with me"—and she displayed the bundle from beneath her cloak—"that I may safely dispose of such dread evidence: nor should I have been so cruel as to ask you, Lucia, to come and witness the catastrophe. And yet I am about to leave this world of strife and wretchedness, of jarring interests and fierce passions—a world in which when once the pathway of crime has been entered upon, it is impossible to make a safe retreat!—But here let us pause for an instant."

A bridge was now reached: a portion of it was being repaired—and there were piles of granite blocks and bricks on the side of the pathway. The Princess had noticed them when paying her visit to the convent of La Trinite. She now stooped down; and opening her bundle upon the pavement, enclosed a couple of bricks; for we should observe that she and her sister stood alone at that hour upon the bridge. In a few moments the blood-stained garments were consigned to the depths of the river that rolled beneath.

"And now whither are you going, Bianca?" asked the Countess for the third time, as her sister, instead of beginning to retrace her steps, continued to lead the way across the bridge.

"My destination is at no great distance," replied the Princess. "Did I not tell you, Lucia, that I was about to abandon a world wherein existence would be no longer tolerable for me? And yet it is not by means of suicide that I am about to escape this world!"

"Ah! methinks I understand, sister!" exclaimed the Countess. "But, Oh! is it possible that the blood upon those garments indicates crimes of so deep a dye——"

"Do not question me, Lucia!" said the Princess, in an earnest tone; and then she continued in solemn accents to say, "Rest assured, Lucia, that however great my crimes have been, they will be fully atoned for. For it is to the penitence of this living tomb that I am about to consign myself:"—and at the same instant Bianca rang the bell of the convent at the gate of which she abruptly stopped short as she thus spoke.

The parting between the twain was brief but deeply affecting; and when Lucia tore herself weeping away from the spot, the massive portals of La Trinite closed upon *Sister Agonia!*

CHAPTER LXV.

THE PRISON-CHAMBER.

WE have often been necessitated in the course of this narrative to describe phases of profound grief and affliction: but we are now perhaps more than ever at a loss for language wherewith to convey an idea of the immensity of that woe and the wildness of that despair which were experienced by Mrs. De Vere, when looking upon her son as a doomed being, beyond the reach of hope. Vainly did the young man summon all his presence of mind to his aid, that he might sustain his unhappy mother and console her if possible. But consolation! Oh, the idea was preposterous! How could she be solaced for the loss of the only being that on earth she loved,—the only one for whom she lived—the joy and the darling of her heart! To look beyond the moment which should snatch him from her, was to gaze upon a prospect so filled with horror and despair that the brain reeled from the contemplation. And then, as she looked upon that strikingly handsome youth, with his slender figure of such perfect masculine symmetry—with his dark hair clustering in natural curls about his well-shaped head—his countenance wearing such an ingenuous candour of expression,—his features so perfectly regular—his mouth so finely chiselled, and revealing a set of such brilliant teeth,—as the poor mother thus contemplated her son, we say, and beheld him in his Apollo-like beauty, and remembered that his years had only numbered twenty, she thought it absolutely impossible that any laws were so cruel or any human beings so merciless as to take away the life of one so handsome and so young! But, Ah! those dreamy intervals of doubt and bewilderment were quickly succeeded by periods of the most appalling certainty, when all the reality of the awful circumstances environing that bright and beautiful one could be no longer shut out from her contemplation!

"Oh, my beloved boy!" exclaimed Mrs. De Vere, in one of those moments when all the violence of her distress burst forth, carrying her as it were to the very verge of madness: "I feel as if I, your own mother, have become your murderer! Good God! if I had not spoken harshly to you in Florence, you would not have fled away—and you would never have become involved in those adventures which are fast leading to a horrible catastrophe!"

"Do not blame yourself, dearest mother," said Charles, lavishing upon his afflicted parent the tenderest filial caresses. "Circumstances combined against me! I do not blame Lord Ormsby for misjudging me—much less can I blame you for yielding to his representations. And Oh! I thank God that my innocence has been cleared up, and that my poor Agnes"—here his voice quivered, but by dint of an almost preternatural effort he conquered the emotions that were on the very point of bursting forth—and he said, "At all events my poor Agnes will not have to look upon me as one who was faithless, depraved, and unworthy of her!"

"No, Charles—no!" murmured Mrs. De Vere, the tears raining down her cheeks, and her bosom

convulsed with sobs; "your memory will be prized as that of one who was in every respect pure-minded and noble-hearted! Yes—the lips of all speak well of you! That amiable Countess who told me everything that had happened—the sister of the wretch who betrayed you, and who even in the very tribunal itself buoyed you up with a false hope——"

"No, no, dear mother!" interposed Charles, "you must not speak thus bitterly! I feel confident that the Princess of Spartivento experiences the utmost sorrow and remorse for all that she has done, and that she will leave no stone unturned to undo the consequences of her wickedness. She did not willingly deceive me with a false hope; but perhaps she may have buoyed herself up with one that cannot possibly be realized."

"Oh, my dear boy, if I thought that there was the slightest chance in that quarter, I would hasten to the Princess—I would throw myself at her feet—I would pardon her for what she has done in the hope that by her aid it might all be undone! Yes, I will go——"

"No, dearest mother—remain with me, I beseech you!" said Charles. "I am inspired with courage by your presence. I should sink into despondency if I were left alone! Besides, I dare not allow myself to yield to the influence of hope, for fear it should suffer disappointment. Death would then be armed with triple terrors and in the revulsion of feeling I might die a coward! Remain with me therefore, dearest mother."

"I will remain with you, Charles," she murmured, pressing him again and again to her bosom.

"Rest assured," he resumed, "that if there be anything to be done, the Princess will persevere through remorse, and the Countess will lead her aid through kindness. No entreaty on your part would urge them on more quickly than they are now likely to be proceeding!"

Hours passed away; and the unhappy mother remained with her son. The generous consideration of Laura and Mirtille Germinoi furnished elegant repasts; but they went away untouched from the prison chamber. The evening came—the dusk closed in—candles were placed on the table; and when Mrs. De Vere reflected how short the time was now growing—that no message of hope or encouragement came from the outside—that the sentence was to be executed at daybreak—and that in a few brief hours she might behold her darling boy a stark cold corpse—she felt as if it were impossible she could any longer bear up against an idea so appalling, so astounding, so stupefying! She shrank from the immensity of such ineffable woe! And as the time went on, and the night deepened, Charles began to get frightened on his mother's account. She sat gazing upon him with a strange sort of vacancy. She played with his curling hair: she smiled listlessly; and she began to tell him "how his hair had curled in his infancy, and how she had always prophesied it would continue to do so as he grew up, so that she did not now find herself mistaken." Then she started suddenly—pressed her hand to her brow—flung a quick frightened look around—and with a shriek caught him to her bosom. The sense of his true position had suddenly broken in upon her again; and then followed a scene of the wildest grief for

the description of which we can find no possible language.

And thus did the unfortunate condition of Mrs. De Vere's mind continue to exhibit itself as the night deepened,—those phases of vacancy and morbid listlessness becoming longer and longer as they alternated with the sudden outbursts of woe which followed upon a returning sense of the actual reality. Charles trembled lest his unfortunate mother's reason should abandon her; for it actually seemed as if her brain was already giving way. And yet there were moments when he could not help thinking that it might be a happy event if his parent should lose in mental numbness the keen sense of that position which was presently to become one of utter bereavement.

It was past midnight: Charles had not thought of retiring to rest—indeed he did not purpose to do so—and his mother seemed to have lost all idea of the lapse of time. Indeed, for the last hour she had continued seated by his side, biding his hand in her own—sometimes playing with his hair—then caressing his cheek—and gazing on him the while as if she merely knew who he was, but was listlessly abstracted from all surrounding circumstances. But all of a sudden she gave one of those starts which made her seem as if she were abruptly galvanized: the light of intelligence flamed up in her eyes—and with a wild shriek she flung her arms about his neck, crying, "No, no! they shall not take you from me! They shall not! Oh, my beloved boy! What! you to die! My God! no!"

"Mother, mother—I entreat and implore——"

"Charles, Charles!" and now it was scream upon scream that thrilled from her lips; and she gave vent to a grief so passionate and a despair so ineffable, that it seemed as if her brain must burst and her heart must break.

At this crisis, when the youth himself felt as if the bitterness of death were now only just beginning, the key was heard to turn in the lock and the bolts were drawn back.

"My God! they come to fetch you!" cried the distracted mother. "But they shall not!—no, they shall not! I will die for you!"

"Tranquillize yourself, dear mother!—they come not to fetch me yet! There must be still an hour or two!"

The door opened; and in rushed a female form, while the words, "Saved! saved!" pealed in ecstatic accents through the prison-apartment.

It was the Countess di Milazzo.

"Saved?" echoed Mrs. De Vere: and she stood like one bereft of reason.

"Saved! saved!" cried the Countess, panting for breath. "Life and liberty! freedom and fortune! See! your door stands open!—and in a few minutes others will be here besides that gleeful to confirm my words!"

Oh! wild, wild indeed was now the ejaculation of joy—the cry of thrilling rapture which burst from the lips of Mrs. De Vere; and impassioned, fervid, glowing was the embrace in which she strained her son! Then she flew to the Countess—she pressed her to her bosom—she lavished upon her the most endearing epithets. And that the tidings were indeed true was evinced by the entrance of the turnkey, who grasped our hero by the hand, heartily congratulating him on

this sudden change which had so providentially occurred. And then in a few minutes came General Germini, accompanied by his two daughters; for they all hastily huddled on their clothing when the Countess di Milazzo had rung at the house to present the packet in the young Count of Camerino's name. The amiable and excellent-hearted Laura and Mirilla took charge of Mrs. D. Vere; for the excitement of so much joy overpowered her, and she sank senseless into their arms. The General shook hands with our hero—felicitated him on his escape from the doom which had been decreed—and expressed a hope that no ill-will would be cherished towards himself, inasmuch as he had performed nothing more than his duty. Charles might have answered that this duty had been somewhat roughly done, and in the fierce spirit of Government partisanship; but he was not merely in too good a humour to say an unpleasant word to a living soul, but he likewise entertained the most grateful recollection of the generous treatment which his mother had experienced at the hands of the Commandant's daughters. Thus he at once begged General Germini to be entirely at his ease on the point just mentioned; and he then said, "I could wish to speak alone for a few minutes with the Countess di Milazzo."

"You are now the master of your own actions, my lord," responded the Governor. "The Government proclamation, by virtue of which you are set at freedom, is unmistakable and imperative. It decrees that whosoever should surrender up the correspondence of the late Carlo Alberto, should, if a member of any Secret Political Society, be pardoned; and is liable to any penalties in consequence of political offences, he shall also receive a free pardon, with complete restoration to his civil and political rights, and to the enjoyment of his estates, fortune, or other possessions that might have been confiscated or become liable to forfeiture. And therefore, my Lord Count of Camerino, you are in all respects absolved from any consequences of your connexion with the late conspiracy."

"And it shall now be my endeavour," answered Charles, "to convince the Tuscan Government that I was led entirely against my will into the insane attempt that was made upon Leghoro——"

"A task wherein it will be easy for me and my sister to afford such corroborative evidence as shall place the matter beyond the possibility of doubt;"—and it was with emphasis that the Countess of Milazzo thus spoke.

General Germini retired; and Charles, taking Lucia's hand, exclaimed, "Oh, my dear friend! how illimitable is the debt of gratitude I owe you!"

"Let me disabuse you at once, Charles," interrupted Lucia. "It was not I who have done this! It was my penitent and remorse-stricken sister!"

"Then never again," cried our hero vehemently, "shall the name of the Princess of Spartivento be mentioned by me otherwise than with gratitude, if not with respect!"

"Thank you—thank you, Charles!" cried Lucia fervently, "for this assurance!"

"Let me speed to thank your sister in person!" exclaimed our hero.

"No," rejoined the Countess: "that may not be! She is not equal to such a meeting. Go to your mother—be happy with her! I am about to return to Bianca!"

"One word, Lucia! one word!" cried Charles. "How came your sister to get possession of that valuable and important correspondence?"

"Do not ask me—at least not now, Charles! Suffice it for you to experience all the blessings which flow from the production of that dear apostrophe. And now farewell for the present!"

Having thus spoken, Lucia hurried out of the prison chamber; and she retraced her way to the hotel, where she described to her sister all that had just taken place, and how the young Count of Camerino was in the enjoyment of freedom.

General Germini was in every respect a time-serving individual—a worldly-minded man—without principle, selfish, and cunning. He would have helped to crush our hero when he thought that the latter was completely down in the world; but now that his star was so fully in the ascendant, the Commandant lost no time in worshipping it. To be on intimate terms with the young Count of Camerino, who was immensely rich, and possessed a splendid mansion at no great distance from Siena—a mansion whereat he would doubtless give brilliant entertainments—all these were considerations which failed not to enter into the mind of General Germini. Thus he now overwhelmed our hero with civilities; while his daughters, from the most amiable motives, bestowed their kind attentions on Mrs. De Vere. Charles perfectly well comprehended the character of General Germini, and secretly he despised it; but he accepted with frankness the hospitalities proffered by the Commandant—not merely because he knew that to should be well able to recompense them, but for the reason above stated, that he would not for the world act in a manner that should in any way wound the feelings of Laura or Mirilla. And here we ought to add that the worthy Signor Palmes was overjoyed when he received the tidings of the young Count's liberation and safety.

In the forenoon of the following day Charles had another interview with the Countess di Milazzo.

"You must not ask me," said Lucia, "to tell you into what religious seclusion my penitent sister has retired; you must be contented with learning that she has gone into a convent. Yea! the portals of a religious establishment have already closed upon her!—and under another name the identity of the Princess of Spartivento is lost! Believe me, Charles, whatever her misdeeds may have been, her penitence is truly great!"

"And thus your sister has retired from the world?" said our hero, who was at first lost in amazement when the tidings were communicated to him; but after a little reflection, he added, "Well, it is perhaps better thus! Yea—it is better thus! Did you convey to your sister——"

"All the generous assurances which you sent through the medium of my lips; and she is deeply grateful. Here is a document, to which her name is attached as well as mine. It contains a complete exoneration on your behalf of any willing complicity in the machinations and schemes which led to the attack upon Leghoro. By the aid of this paper," added Lucia, "you may put yourself completely right with the Tuscan Government."

"In every sense, my dear friend," said Charles, "you exhibit towards me the kindest consideration. And now let me hasten to give you the as-

assurance that my mother desires to have you as a guest at my mansion—she will love and cherish you——”

“I am come to bid you farewell, Charles,” interrupted the Countess. “Within an hour I shall take my departure from Sienna.”

“Indeed?” ejaculated our hero. “So soon? so speedily?”

“Yes,” responded Lucia. “I have no secrets from you: I am about to return forthwith to Turin. My sister has entrusted me to realise all her vast possessions, that she may bestow liberal endowments upon the church and on other religious institutions. The convent which she has entered will not be forgotten. She offered me none of her wealth, because she knew that I required it not; for I myself am rich. But she has presented me with her splendid palace at Turin; and I can assure you, Charles, that it will not be very long before all those secret subterranean will be bricked up; for henceforth I bid farewell to all political intrigues that have to be carried on amidst so much mystery.”

“And such is precisely my intention,” observed our hero, “in reference to my own mansion. But you are about to bid me farewell? Remember, Lucia, that there is a bond of eternal friendship between us, and when I have conducted my Agnes to the altar, you must come and visit us—you know full well that you will be received as a welcome guest——”

“When you are settled, Charles, with your beautiful wife, and dwelling in the married state, and having your mother likewise with you at that splendid mansion which you possess, I shall indeed have much pleasure in visiting you. Yes—Oh, yes!” added Lucia fervently; “for no one more sincerely wishes you the enjoyment of happiness than I! And now farewell.”

Our hero kissed her on the brow; and again may we say, as on a former occasion, that it was friendship’s kiss, so pure, so chaste, that Agnes need not have been jealous if she had seen it given. And then Lucia repaired to the apartment where Mrs. De Vere was seated with Laura and Mirtilia; and to those ladies her adieux were likewise paid. In less than an hour afterwards the Countess was on her way from Sienna.

In the course of that day the young Count showed General Germini the document which had been drawn up and signed by Bianca and Lucia; and the Commandant at once volunteered to transmit it to the Government, backed by a strong letter from his own hand. Charles accepted the proposal; and the despatches were accordingly sent off without delay to Florence.

But let us now give a few explanations of a retrospective character. The reader will remember that when our hero hastened away from Florence in order to speed to England and obtain an interview with Agnes, Lord Ormsby sent a courier after him. This courier traced Charles as far as Turin; and there he abruptly lost sight of him. He accordingly returned to Florence, to report to Lord Ormsby the failure of his mission. Meanwhile ten days had elapsed; and Ormsby, on the return of the courier, was resolved to proceed with the utmost despatch to England, so that he might by his presence there efface the evil impression he had left upon the mind of Charles in Florence.

Ormsby had in the meanwhile sent off letters to his daughter, to explain how grievously he had been mistaken in falsely accusing Charles; and he enclosed beneath the same envelopes letters for Charles himself, containing everything that was suitable and appropriate to the altered circumstances of the case. But not satisfied with having merely sent these letters, Ormsby set off for England, as we have already said, so soon as he found that the mission of the courier had proved a failure, and that having tracked our hero to Turin he there utterly lost sight of him.

When Lord Ormsby left Florence, he advised Mrs. De Vere to return to Naples, and make suitable apologies to the ambassador for her son’s continued absence, so that there might be no chance of an unfavourable report being sent concerning him to the Government at home. But scarcely had Lord Ormsby left Florence—and while Mrs. De Vere was beginning to prepare for a return to Naples—she received the letter which Charles had despatched from the Camerino mansion, acquainting her with the almost fabulous intelligence that he had become possessed of immense wealth and of a noble title. Amazed and delighted with the intelligence, Mrs. De Vere set off for her son’s country seat; but alas! on arriving there, it was only to receive the sad tidings that he had been arrested a few hours previously and conveyed to Sienna. This was the first intimation she had received of his forced complicity in the perilous and startling adventures that had been crowned by the failure at Leghorn. Thus the unfortunate lady, when thinking to congratulate her son for having risen to the very height of prosperity, had found herself borne down into the very vortex of despair, and crushed almost to annihilation by the awful proceedings at Sienna!

Having given these requisite explanations, we may resume the thread of our narrative. The young Count accepted the hospitalities of General Germini’s mansion for a couple of days after the tremendous incidents which we have been just recording; because he found it absolutely necessary to allow his mother an interval of repose to recruit her strength after the painfully exhausting processes through which she had passed. It was now our hero’s intention to proceed with his mother, to his mansion. But here we think some of our readers will exclaim, “What! did he not instantaneously set off to visit his Agnes in England?” Fair indeed were he to have flown upon the wings of love for that purpose; but there were several reasons which prevented him. In the first place he would not leave his mother, who was perfectly incompetent to undertake so long a journey at present. In the second place, let it be borne in mind that all the formalities for putting him in complete possession of his estates and title were not yet accomplished, and that in the course of the next few days it would be requisite for him to sign certain documents in the presence of the authorities in the town of Camerino. In the third place, Charles felt very well assured that Lord Ormsby would have no objection, after everything that had occurred, to bring his daughter with the least possible delay into Italy; and our hero experienced a very natural pride at the idea of welcoming his intended bride to his own mansion and estates—to those paternal halls

and that superb domain the possession of which she was destined to share with him. For let it be well understood that immediately after the liberation of our hero from the prison-chamber—aye, within the very hour that was then passing—a courier was sent off with letters for both Lord Ormsby and Agnes in England, so as to anticipate the probability of any evil tidings reaching them ere the favourable intelligence could be communicated.

The reader will now understand under what circumstances it was that Charles resolved to return to the Camerino mansion. He expressed the warmest thanks to General Germini for the hospitalities that had been afforded; and sincere indeed was the assurance of his gratitude to the amiable Laura and Mirtilla. Mrs. De Vere gave them a pressing invitation to come and stay shortly at the Camerino mansion, promising to write and let them know when the Hon. Miss Evelyn and her father should arrive there, so that they might be made acquainted with each other. And now behold the young Count of Camerino, and Mrs. De Vere, and Signor Palmieri, taking their seats in the carriage which had brought our hero a captive to Siena! And the streets of the city were lined with crowds to witness the departure; for the case of the young Count had created the deepest sympathy when presenting its adverse phase, and the liveliest joy when showing its prosperous one. Aye, and still more fervid, if possible, were the manifestations of delight with which our hero was received by his tenantry and his peasantry, and finally by the members of his household, when returning to his own domain. Triumphant arches were erected—bands of music sent forth their enlivening sounds—and salves of musketry were fired. The municipal authorities of the town of Camerino waited upon the young Count to present him a congratulatory address on returning in safety to his abode;—and, to be brief, the liveliest demonstrations of joy prevailed throughout the neighbourhood.

Was not Mrs. De Vere happy now? She could scarcely believe that some portion of that black and hideous Past to which she looked back had been within the range of possibility: but she assuredly did not intentionally bend her regards thereon, nor studiously revert her gaze to disagreeable subjects, now that there were so many elements of joy and gladness for her contemplation. And never had she felt more proud of her son—not so much because he was possessed of princely wealth and a proud title; but because she knew beyond the possibility of doubt that through all the adventurous circumstances of the past he had borne an unblemished reputation and had secured friends by his noble spirit, his chivalrous mind, and his unflinching integrity. And perhaps Mrs. De Vere was also well pleased to find that all the magnanimous conduct of her son towards the late Count of Camerino should have been recompensed by the bestowal of that patrician title which completely merged the obscurer name he had hitherto borne, and that there was now little chance of any one ever studying to penetrate into the mysteries of the *past* so far as they regarded his birth.

In a few days the formalities were all fulfilled, and our hero was placed in complete possession of the title and estates of Camerino. A few more

days elapsed, and then arrived an answer to the documents which had been forwarded to the Tuscan Government. The Minister of the Interior begged to assure the Lord Count of Camerino that his explanations were completely satisfactory, and that he need not thenceforth experience the slightest uneasiness on account of the idea which at first existed that his complicity in the attack on Leghorn had been wilful and intentional. The Minister congratulated our hero on his accession to title and fortune, and concluded with the assurance that he would be well received by the Grand Duke whenever he might think fit to visit that Sovereign's Court.

Some more days went by—and now we come to an incident with which we may very suitably conclude a chapter which perhaps has not been found the least interesting in this narrative. Charles had been riding out one day, accompanied by his bailiff or land-steward, in order that he might visit some of the principal tenants on his estate; and it was somewhat late in the afternoon when he returned to the mansion. As he alighted from his horse at the front entrance, his principal valet, who was loitering on the steps—or rather, we should say, who in reality had been watching there for at least an hour past—stepped forward, and said, “If you please, my lord, the signora would be glad to speak to your lordship before you retire to dress for dinner.”

“Indeed?” cried our hero. “I hope, Flurella, that nothing has happened—that my mother is quite well?”

“Oh, yes, my lord,” was the response quickly and cheerfully given; and it was accompanied by a sort of half smile. “The signora is perfectly well. I think, my lord, there are letters—or—yes—letters from England—”

“Ah! from England?” and dashing past his valet, Charles sped to the apartment in which his mother was seated.

“My dear Charles,” she at once cried, and her countenance was radiant with happiness—“Oh, how different from its pallor and its ghastliness on that awful night which she had dreaded might be his last!—“I have good news for you.”

“Let me embrace you, mother, for the assurance! Letters, I suppose?—a courier?”

“Well, not exactly. But an arrival—Ah! my dear boy, you will be so happy!—To be brief, Lord Ormsby is come—and everything is satisfactory—You are to wed Agnes—”

“Oh, joy, dear mother! joy! But Agnes herself—dear Agnes?” cried Charles: “why did not her father bring her? Is she well?”

“I believe never better in her life, my dear boy. But—but—in short, you had better ask his lordship to explain everything. You will find him in the room leading to the aviary—and the fountains.”

Away sped our hero: he reached the apartment which his mother had indicated: he opened the door, longing to ascertain from Ormsby's lips why he had not brought his daughter: when, behold! who should meet his eyes, but that beloved being herself, radiant with all her bewitching beauty, his charming and adored Agnes, who in another moment was clasped to his heart!



CHAPTER LXVI.

THE CAMERINO MANSION.

It would be scarcely possible to depict a higher degree of earthly rapture than that which was experienced by the lovers on being thus reunited. Upwards of a twelvemonth had elapsed since they parted in England, at the time when our hero received his appointment as an *attaché* to the British Embassy at Naples. And during that period what marvellous incidents had come within the range of his experience! what dangers had he encountered! what perils had he passed through! and how much had he seen of the world! And then too, at that date when he left England as an obscure pupil in the schools of diplomacy, how little had he foreseen what prosperity would be in store for him at the end of the vista of trials and

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dangers! And how little, too, had the beautiful Agnes ventured to anticipate that he—this handsome and excellent young man—the object of her sincerest affections—was destined to attain to so high a position in so short a time! It is true that our amiable heroine would have been happy with him as his bride even though it were the humblest cottage that they might have to occupy: but how far greater the amount of felicity which they might now hope to enjoy, residing in a palatial mansion and surrounded by everything that wealth could bestow!

Agnes now learnt for the first time a full and detailed account of everything that had happened to her beloved Charles, with the exception of all those particulars which had regarded her erring cousin Floribel; and these he still continued to suppress for the most considerate of reasons, though he knew full well that the actual truth must eventually ooze out by some means or an-

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other. Indeed, he gave the complete narrative to Lord Ormsby, and consulted with that nobleman how it were best to break the intelligence to Agnes: but it was agreed to postpone this painful task for the present, so that nothing might mar the happiness which the amiable girl experienced under the influence of existing circumstances.

On the occasion of his last visit to England, to see his daughter and tell her of the painful things that had occurred at Florence in respect to the injurious suspicions which had been so unhappily excited against our hero,—Ormsby had found that the Government was quite ready and willing to recognise his title to the peerage and estates which he claimed; and the Lord Chancellor had assured him that the appeal to the Committee of Privileges in the House of Lords would prove a mere matter of form. The Commissioners of Woods and Forests at once gave up the large estates in Wiltshire which had for so long a period been held by the Crown in default of the appearance of an heir to the Ormsby Peerage; while the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund were equally prompt in making over the sum of ready money, now more than two hundred thousand pounds. Thus Ormsby at length openly assumed his title, and he ceased to appear in the world as simple Mr. Hargrave.

Our hero failed not, in his private discourse with Lord Ormsby, to explain everything he heard from the lips of Floribel Lister at Turin, in respect to the infamous compact made betwixt Mr. and Mrs. Hardress. Of that compact Charles himself was one of the objects, the unprincipled husband having given leave and permission to his licentious-minded wife to bestow her favours upon our hero if he himself would respond to her overtures. Charles also explained to Lord Ormsby how these overtures had been made at Florence, and how completely he had repulsed them. Ormsby in his turn entered into details to show how completely he had been deceived by Cicely; and thus all these matters were completely cleared up to the knowledge of each other. Indeed, Charles had previously heard from his mother's lips some portion of these circumstances which regarded Ormsby's interviews with Cicely: but they were now more fully detailed by this nobleman himself, and therefore acquired a more perfect significance.

Charles was greatly grieved to hear of that terrible tragedy which involved the fate of Gustavus Barrington and the quadroon. On the other hand, he was pleased to learn that Sir Roderick and Lady Dalham were now in the enjoyment of as much prosperity as a short time back their position had been marked by adversity. We must minutely explain to the reader what were the immediate results of the sudden and simultaneous departure of Gustavus Barrington and his quadroon wife from the world. Mr. Pincock in the West Indies was dead, having left his immense fortune to his daughter Emily—for his daughter she really was, although she had always passed as his niece. As a matter of course that fortune became the property of Gustavus in right of his wife; and when both died, it devolved upon Winifred, her cousin's heiress. And not only the fortune of the late Mr. Pincock, but likewise the fortune left by old Mr. Barrington, and which was the prize earned by the long-contested lawsuit! Yes—two fortunes were thus simultaneously inherited by Sir Rode-

rick and Lady Dalham; and our hero, the young Count of Camerino, was much delighted when these circumstances were explained to him, although on the other he deeply deplored the lamentable and romantic fate of Gustavus and Emily.

We may here incidentally mention that immediately after the occurrences at Sienna, and when firmly established in the possession of the Camerino estates, our hero sent off a messenger to Turin, with a letter for Floribel, beseeching and imploring that she would permit him to provide in a respectable and honourable manner for her future maintenance. But the messenger returned without being able to discover the slightest trace of the young lady to whom the letter was addressed.

Communications were received from the Marquis of Ortona, who having been severely wounded in the boat during the retreat from Leghorn, had lain for two or three weeks in a very critical state at Genoa. So soon as Signor Palmas had completed all the business which regarded the heritage of the young Count of Camerino, he repaired to Genoa, to see his other noble client, the Marquis of Ortona. It appeared that the Piedmontese Government was by no means inclined to take notice of the fact that an armed expedition had been fitted out from the Sardinian shores to make an attempt upon the territory of a neighbouring Power with whom that Government was at peace. The truth was that King Victor Emmanuel was too much delighted at having got into his possession, through the Grand Duke of Tuscany, the correspondence which his father Carlo Alberto had for a long period carried on with the Carbonari. The Grand Duke of Tuscany himself desired at that particular moment, and for several reasons, to adopt a conciliatory policy; and he therefore suffered it to be understood that those Tuscan subjects who might have been concerned in the late attempt upon Leghorn, should be pardoned on presenting themselves within a given time to any of the local authorities and taking the oath of allegiance: while in respect to those conspirators who were not Tuscan subjects, a pardon was to be accorded to such as should apply for it. These merciful measures, following so speedily on the fierce proclamations that had been issued and the terrific penalties that had been fulminated against the conspirators, naturally excited much amazement. But those who were behind the scenes comprehended full well that the letters of Charles Albert compromised so many exalted and influential persons throughout Italy, that if the proscription were continued against the members of those Secret Societies which recognised the Marquis of Ortona as their chief, there was the danger of being compelled to include a number of persons who could make very disagreeable revelations in respect to that correspondence which has so often been referred to. There were other reasons why the Tuscan Government found itself in a position to be lenient in the present case. The explosion of the late conspiracy had completely disheartened all the leaders of that political party; and there was not the slightest chance of their being enabled to rally their secret forces, even if they still possessed the inclination. It was thus that the Grand Duke could afford to be merciful—the opportunity was convenient—and this therefore was

the course of policy which the Tuscan Sovereign adopted. Some people supposed that it was a species of compliment which his Royal Highness paid to the young Count of Camerino, after all the strange adventures that had occurred; and others suggested that Lord Ormsby had used the influence which as a British Peer he possessed with the English Ambassador at Florence, to induce this diplomatist to recommend a lenient course to the Florentine Government. Indeed, it was supposed that one of the main objects of the conciliatory policy was to hush up the share that the Marquis of Ortona had taken in the late conspiracy; and hence it was surmised that the friendship of the young Count of Camerino had interested itself on that nobleman's behalf. But the truth is that neither Charles nor Lord Ormsby interfered at all in the matter, beyond urging Signor Palmas to recommend the Marquis of Ortona to do everything he could to put himself right with the several Italian Governments, lest it should end in his proscription and exile, or even in a more serious catastrophe. The Marquis yielded to these representations; and he availed himself of the alternative which permitted him, not being a subject of Tuscany, to obtain a pardon on applying for it.

The Marquis of Ortona was, as the reader will recollect, a Neapolitan; and therefore he would not have particularly cared about setting himself right with the Government of Tuscany, were it not that he was most anxious to pay a visit to our hero. The Marquis was a good-hearted and well-meaning man, notwithstanding the severity with which he may have seemed to fulfil his duties as leader of the conspirators when our hero was involved in such tremendous perils at the Spartivento palace. A brave man himself, he admired courage in others; and he had seen enough of Charles to be convinced of his magnanimity. The Marquis had expected to succeed to the property of his late friend the Count of Camerino; but when he found that it was left to our hero, he was merely filled with amazement—he experienced no envy nor jealousy. Indeed, he had formed a friendship for Charles; and he was most anxious to be in a position to visit him at his palatial mansion and congratulate him on his accession to an ancient title and to great wealth.

The year 1849 closed in happiness for our hero and his intended bride, and for those who were interested in them. In the early part of January of the ensuing year there was gaiety at the Camerino mansion. The Marquis of Ortona arrived there, accompanied by Signor Palmas; and the British Ambassadors from Naples and from Florence had accepted invitations to pass a few days beneath the hospitable roof of the young Count. The promise made by Mrs. De Vere to Laura and Mirilla was not forgotten; and as a matter of course, their father General Germini was included in the invitation. It was accepted; and most affectionately were the Italian sisters welcomed by Mrs. De Vere and by Agnes, so that in the kindness which they now received they were recompensed for the generous sympathy which they had shown towards a fellow-creature at a period of the deepest mental affliction.

For several days there were festivities and banquets at the Camerino mansion: but on one par-

ticular evening a grand entertainment was given, to which all the nobility and gentry resident in the neighbourhood were invited. Upwards of four hundred guests were assembled in the state saloons: and amongst them were some of the finest specimens of Italian beauty. But who could compare with the charming Agnes? whose loveliness could compete with her's? She was the centre of all admiration—the cynosure of all regards; and our hero's heart thrilled with rapturous pride as he beheld the homage which was paid to that being whom he so sincerely and devotedly loved!

The entertainment was over—it was past one o'clock in the morning—Agnes retired to her chamber—and the two lady's-maids who had been specially appointed to minister unto her, were soon dismissed to take their own rest. Our lovely heroine sought her couch, thinking of the incidents of the evening, and pondering with pleasurable sensations the tender words which Charles had breathed in her ear. Sleep now sank upon her eyes; and she slumbered serenely and profoundly. How long she slept she knew not—but presently she opened her eyes; and even when thus awaking, she fancied that she was in a dream, for her thoughts were more or less in confusion, and the images floating in her brain were only seen with vagueness and uncertainty, like objects that are discerned by the physical vision through a mist. A light was burning in the room; and as Agnes awoke, her face was turned towards a wall against which there stood a large and splendid wardrobe of rosewood elaborately carved. The paper with which the room was hung, was of a light pattern, and threw out in strong relief the objects that stood against the walls. The apartment was spacious; and the night-lamp burnt upon the toilet-table, which was on the opposite side of the bed to the wardrobe. It was therefore with a certain degree of dimness that the light fell upon the wall against which this wardrobe stood.

As Agnes lay in a sort of dreamy bewilderment, with her eyes open, yet scarcely conscious of being veritably awake, the idea gradually stole into her mind that she was looking upon a door the existence of which now seemed to be revealing itself for the first time. She continued gazing—she became more completely awake—and she felt assured that she was labouring under no delusion; for there, in that wall against which the wardrobe stood, was a piece of blackness, so to speak, of the height, width, regularity, and shape of what a door would be. A sensation of terror now seized upon our heroine: she started up in her couch—she gazed more intently, until she became unmistakably convinced that there was indeed a door now standing open in the wall against which the wardrobe stood! She perfectly well remembered that all over the space where that door at present appeared, there was ordinarily wont to be only the light-coloured paper with its beautiful paeonypattern.

Smitten with almight, Agnes was on the very point of precipitating herself from her couch in order to ring the bell, when a figure suddenly appeared in that doorway. It was a female form—and the rustling of her dress proved that it was no preternatural apparition: One glimpse of her

countenance as she came more completely within the sphere of light—one glimpse was sufficient for Agnes!—and a cry of mingled joy and amazement burst from her lips, as she recognised the lost Floribel!

About fifteen months had elapsed since they last met,—fifteen months during which Floribel had been enlarging her experiences in the sphere of profligacy, while Agnes had been giving as many additional proofs of her immaculate virtues. But, Ah! Agnes knew not how criminal her cousin had been!—the generous consideration and delicacy of Charles De Vere had kept her in the dark on these points!

And now the erring Floribel was clasped in the arms of the pure-minded Agnes; and the frail one was pressed to the chaste bosom of Virtue's own personification. Tears of joy ran down the cheeks of the affectionate Agnes;—tears flowing from other sources gushed from the eyes of Floribel. It was a long time before either of them could give utterance to a word. And amidst the many powerful feelings which this meeting conjured up on the part of Agnes, she forgot under what strange circumstances Floribel had presented herself.

At length the first effusion of emotions on either side being past, Agnes, retaining her cousin's hand in both her own, and gazing with mingled delight and tenderness upon her countenance, exclaimed, "Is it possible that this can be otherwise than a dream?"

And now as she had leisure to contemplate Floribel, she saw that her cousin was as handsome as ever,—aye, even perhaps handsomer than she had ever before known her, with her hair of raven darkness arranged in plain bands, with the warm blood mantling beneath the delicate brunette complexion of her countenance, and the dress that she wore defining all the luxurious proportions of her shape. For Floribel, on springing forward into her cousin's arms, had dropped from her shoulders a cloak in which she was muffled when first making her appearance in the apartment.

On the other hand, Floribel, while contemplating Agnes, likewise was impressed with the idea that never had she seen her cousin so bewitchingly beautiful,—her long auburn hair floating like burnished gold upon her ivory shoulders, and pleasure calling up the softest blush of the rose to her cheeks, while a kindred light played in the depths of her large blue eyes. And thus to each other did the cousins seem more beautiful than ever they had appeared before!

"Is it indeed you, Floribel? or is it a dream?" asked Agnes. "For, Oh! it appears to me as if the slightest motion that I made would dispel the charming vision! But no—it is not a dream—and you are here, dear Floribel! But why come you so mysteriously? why at this hour, and thus stealthily? Know you not that my father is here? Yes—your uncle, Floribel!—and he will welcome you to his arms! And know you not that Charles also is here?—and he will receive you hospitably beneath this roof!"

"I have come to see you, Agnes—and you only," answered Floribel. "Stealing upon you thus mysteriously, my visit must be as fleeting as it is in other respects ghost-like."

"Oh! you must not leave me, now that you are

restored to me?" exclaimed Agnes. "Charles told me that you were dwelling in strict seclusion——"

"Ah!" said Floribel: "he has told you that? And are you sure, Agnes, that he has not breathed a syllable which has at all prepared you to think otherwise of me?"

"Oh, no! no! What mean you?" asked our heroine, almost in affright.

"I mean this, Agnes," resumed Floribel,— "that inasmuch as you will henceforth dwell chiefly in Italy—or at least methought that such was the probability on account of your husband's position—And, Oh! Agnes, no one could more sincerely than myself congratulate you on his altered fortunes and all the felicity that is in store for you——"

"Oh! I know that you feel thus kindly for him—thus tenderly for me!" interjected Agnes. "But pray proceed. What were you about to tell me? You were on the point of remarking that as it is probable I shall henceforth dwell principally in this clime——"

"Yes—and such being the case," said Floribel, "it is almost certain that sooner or later you would find out what I had been, and what under other names I have done—I mean the errors into which I have fallen——"

"No, no! do not tell me this!" murmured Agnes, growing very pale, and flinging a look of absolute affright upon her cousin. "What would you have me understand?"

"I would have you understand that Charles, for the kindest and best of reasons, has suppressed all the worst that regards me. He has represented me as penitent—and penitent I have not been! In a word, Agnes, he has abstained from telling you the truth, for fear lest it should plant a dagger into your gentle heart. Nay, more! he has doubtless told everything to your father—but Lord Ormeby has also thrown a veil over the circumstances the revelation of which would only afflict you sorely!"

The tears trickled from the eyes of Agnes: they were no longer tears of joy, but of distress at the words which thus fell upon her ears, though she was still far from having a right comprehension of the tale that was being told.

"For the most generous of feelings," pursued Floribel, "you are kept in a state of delusion; and this shall last no longer! I know that the maintenance of the secret might be fraught with much embarrassment and apprehension for your father and your intended husband. They must dread lest any sudden accident should reveal to you the real truth with the effect of a shock! This is a state of things which I could not permit to exist any longer; and I have come expressly to prepare you, Agnes, for whatever revelations may in process of time be made unto you. Ah! you will wonder how I came hither?—and I must not omit to tell you. If I mention the name of La Dolfin——"

"Ah! that infamous woman who was executed the other day at Florence for her crimes? She was a poisoner! Charles has told me some particulars concerning her. But you, Floribel,—Oh, how is it possible that you should have known anything of her?"

"Listen to me, my dear Agnes. That vile

woman was intimately acquainted with the subterranean passages and secret recesses of this mansion——"

"I know it. She was arrested in the subterranean."

"She gave an entire plan of them, before her execution, to the Tuscan authorities," continued Floribel. "It was either out of revenge against Charles for being the cause of her capture—or else in the hope of making favour with the Government——"

"No matter, Floribel. She gave the plan, you say? But you——"

"I am about to explain, dear Agnes. For the reasons which I have already stated, I was resolved to visit you—to obtain one more interview with you in this world, that I might prepare you for what you may sooner or later hear of me. Ah! I should mention that I was living under a feigned name in the neighbourhood of Turin, when I learnt through the public prints how Charles, having passed through a marvellous series of adventures, had risen to his present position. I set off, I repeat, to visit you: I arrived in Florence on my way hither; and accident made me aware that La Dolcina had given particular information to the Government relative to this mansion. A Sardinian officer—a certain Captain St. Didier—with whom I happened to be acquainted," pursued Floribel, with a transient blush, and speaking somewhat hastily, "chanced to be in Florence at the moment——Indeed, he was sent on a special and private mission from the King of Piedmont to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Through his aid I obtained a sight of the plans drawn according to the information given by La Dolcina; and hence my ability thus to seek the interior of the Camerino mansion with this mysterious stealthiness."

"But surely Charles does not know the existence of this communication?" said Agnes, astonished and bewildered at what she heard, and at the same time glancing towards the door which stood open near the wardrobe.

"I cannot say how that may be," responded Floribel. "There is another chamber in the house to which a staircase leads up——"

"Yes!" ejaculated Agnes: "Charles has explained it to me. It has a door formed of a looking glass——"

"True!" said Floribel. "Such was La Dolcina's description. But there is a second staircase—it leads up from a place that has doubtless served as a hall of assembly——"

"Of that likewise I have heard," said Agnes. "And that staircase?"

"It is in the thickness of the wall yonder!" and Floribel pointed towards the open door. "Presently, when I descend, I will leave the door leading into the assembly-hall open: so that if its existence, and the spring that acts upon it, be not already known to Charles, those matters may henceforth cease to remain a secret."

"It is his intention to fill up the subterranean altogether," said Agnes. "Indeed, the orders have already been given to the masons and artificers to get to work. But, Ah! when I bethink me, Floribel, did you not leave this door standing wide open some time before you entered the chamber?"

"Yes," was the answer given in a low murmuring tone. "Scarcely had I opened that door by

means of a secret spring,—scarcely had I caught the first glimpse of you as you lay like an angel pillowed in innocence—when I was so overcome by my feelings that I was compelled to stop short. I staggered back!—Ah, dear Agnes! there was a time, until very lately, when I used to vow that never, never should we meet again!—never should my polluted breath mingle with the sweet atmosphere which surrounds yourself, and which is as it were an emanation of your own purity! But when I found that you were likely to dwell henceforth in Italy, and that therefore you might possibly learn what I have been, I considered it my duty to relieve your intended husband and your father of the task of breaking that intelligence unto you. I will not tell you everything! No!—I cannot! Suffice it to say, Agnes, that as pure and stainless as you are, so polluted and unchaste am I!"

It was almost a scream that burst from the lips of our fair heroine; and as a torrent of tears gushed forth from her eyes, she threw her arms round Floribel's neck, exclaiming vehemently, "Oh, do not speak of yourself thus! At all events if you have sinned, there is penitence—and with penitence there is redemption! Let me entreat you, my dear cousin—Oh, let me, I entreat you——"

"Expend not your pious enthusiasm on me, dear Agnes," interjected Floribel. "My destiny is fixed—and I must accomplish it. Perhaps we shall meet no more: but rest assured, my beloved cousin, that however unworthy I may be of your consideration, yet that never can I cease to think kindly and affectionately of you!—And now farewell."

"Oh, stay! stay, Floribel!" cried Agnes passionately. "I beseech you to stay, and see my father and Charles in the morning! Oh, remain and see your uncle!"

"No—I dare not! I cannot!" said Floribel. "Think you that I have taken the pains to penetrate hither thus stealthily without the most sufficient reasons? Not for worlds would I meet my uncle! And as for Charles—no, no! nor him either! Oh, cease this weeping, Agnes. you wring my heart!—Ah, before I depart let me tell you one thing—and I rejoice to be enabled to proclaim it with all the emphasis of conscientiousness! It is that he whom you are about to espouse—he whom heaven has appointed to take charge of your happiness in this life—is the noblest-hearted and best-principled of men! Oh, if society must bestow titles and wealth upon a select few, none could assuredly be found more worthy than he who now bears the proud rank of Camerino. That you will be happy, Agnes, is beyond all doubt: but it is a consummation only consistent with my sincerest and most heartfelt wishes!"

Floribel threw herself into the arms of her weeping cousin: but speedily tearing herself away from the embrace in which she was strained, she snatched up her cloak—glided towards the door that stood open—and in the twinkling of an eye that door closed behind her.

Agnes fell back upon her pillow, wondering whether it were all a dream from which she might have just been startled up. But no, not—the warm pressure of Floribel's lips was still upon her cheeks—and so were also the tears that had

fallen from Floribel's eyes! An hour elapsed before sleep revisited our gentle heroine; and then all that had just occurred was enacted over again in her visions.

She arose a little later than her usual hour, pale and dispirited: she hastened to Mrs. De Vere's chamber, and told her what had occurred. The worthy lady consoled her as well as she was able; and presently Lord Ormsby and Charles were likewise made acquainted with the incident of the preceding night. Need we say that they were all greatly surprised and affected? And now, inasmuch as Floribel had so far prepared the mind of Agnes to receive whatsoever revelations were in store for her, it was deemed expedient by Lord Ormsby and the young Count that the veil of secrecy should be fully lifted from the antecedents of the erring girl, so that Agnes might not be some day fearfully shocked by the abrupt discovery that Floribel and Ciprina were one and the same person. For throughout Italy the name of Ciprina was associated with that of the Marchioness di Mirano as an example of the utmost dissoluteness and profligacy.

And thus Agnes now learnt the sad tale. She was deeply afflicted—and she wept bitterly. It was a blow to her happiness for the time being; but heaven be thanked! it was the one drawback amidst many sources of bliss—and its effects soon passed off amidst the representations and the consolations that were addressed to her by her father, her lover, and his mother.

On examining the subterranean, a door was found, open, in the hall of assembly, and the existence of which had been previously unknown to our hero. It opened by means of a spring which could be touched on either side. It communicated with a staircase leading up to the chamber which had hitherto been occupied by Agnes. That chamber had a panel-paper, and the mysterious door was exactly of the size to fit one of the panels, all of which had narrow raised borders of rosewood with thin gold beadings. It was thus easy for the existence of that door to be concealed. Charles shuddered when he thought of his beloved Agnes having been consigned to that chamber, to which any other person acquainted with the secret (and there were no doubt many amongst the political confederation that had once held its head-quarters there) might have possibly ascended. He lost no time in setting masons to work throughout the subterranean region; and while the alterations were in progress, the young Count set off to Florence, in company with his mother, his intended bride, and her father, that the nuptials might be solemnized in the chapel of the British Embassy in the Tuscan capital.

CHAPTER LXVII.

BOULOGNE-SUR-MER.

THE scene now shifts to an hotel at Boulogne and the incidents we are about to relate are contemporaneous with those which occupied the latter portion of the preceding chapter—that is to say, towards the middle of January, 1850. In a sitting-apartment at that hotel, the Hon. Mrs. Hardress

was lounging upon a sofa in front of a fire of blazing logs; and she was giving way to her reflections, although she held a book in her hand. It was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon; and Cicely was alone. Let it be borne in mind that it was about seven weeks since we took leave of her in Florence, at the time when she had so signally failed in her libidinous overtures towards our hero.

Presently, as Mrs. Hardress was still in the midst of her meditations, without paying the slightest heed to the book which she held in her hand, the door suddenly opened, and her husband Hector made his appearance. That they had not met since they parted in Florence, after making that compact so outrageously immoral, the reader may judge from the conversation which speedily ensued.

"Ah, Hector!" ejaculated Cicely, giving him her hand, without offering to embrace him. "So you've come at last?"

"Well," he replied, "did I not write and tell you I would be at about this date at Boulogne? You must have got that letter—"

"To be sure," answered Cicely; "or else how would it be possible that I should now be here to meet you? But tell me, how have you fared?"

"Baffled—beaten—utterly discomfited—and that's the truth of it," rejoined Hector. "I have been hunting everywhere for the fair one—but all to no purpose. I wrote and told you how I was put into prison at Turin—"

"Yes—on account of your meeting with—with De Vere," interjected Cicely, a quick flush crossing her countenance. "But you were soon released—were you not?"

"Yes: and then Floribel had disappeared from the hotel where I first found her. De Vere had disappeared also: but the next day I received a letter from him, telling me that if I still wished to receive satisfaction at his hands, I must return to Florence, where he should most probably be enabled to meet me in a few days. His letter was cautiously and mysteriously worded:—and no wonder! for at that very time, you see, Cicely, he was engaged with the conspirators in the affair which subsequently made so great a noise throughout the world."

"What notice did you take of his letter?" inquired Mrs. Hardress: and again the quick flush crossed her countenance.

"What notice did I take of it?" he ejaculated somewhat impatiently. "Why, only a civil notice, to be sure! There were two or three reasons. In the first place I stupidly let out to Floribel that you and I had made a certain compact; and as a matter of course I felt assured that she would tell De Vere everything that passed between us. Well, then I received your letter which expressed no very kind feeling towards De Vere; so that I perfectly understood therefrom you had failed with him as I had failed with Floribel."

"Yes, yes," said Cicely; and for a moment she bit her full rich lips almost until the blood came. "Proceed, Hector. You said there were two or three reasons—"

"There certainly was another—but apart from the rest it would have had little weight with me. You see, Cicely, you and I have both placed ourselves so completely in that young fellow's power,

that with a breath he can destroy our reputations. I was the veriest lunatic on earth to tell Floribel of the compact which you and I had made! A man may go astray—or he may even wink at his wife's going astray: but to give her an actual permission so to do—to consent to his own dishonour—to help to plant horns on his own forehead—*this* indeed is something which no man would like to have thrown in his teeth! And thus I made up my mind that it would be better to let the affair drop with Charles De Vere—or the Count of Camerino, as I suppose we must now call him. But how on earth came you to fail with him, Cicely? One would think that a handsome woman like you—But after all,” said Hector, suddenly interrupting himself, “it is better that it should be as it is;—and mind, the compact no longer exists between us!”

Cicely smiled ironically for a moment, as she said, “Not I suppose until you fall in with some other woman of whom you will become enamoured? But to return to the Count of Camerino, as we must call him. Did you write to him?”

“I was in honour bound to do so,” replied Hector, “as it was I who gave the challenge at Turin. I let several days elapse before I decided how to act; and I was just on the point of writing to him in Florence—where I supposed from the tenor of his note he would be—when I read in the newspaper that a certain young Englishman named Charles De Vere, employed in the British diplomatic service, had just inherited the title and estates of Camerino. I thought there must be some mistake, until I afterwards read that he had suddenly been arrested for being concerned in the attack on Leghorn. So then I thought there was no necessity for writing at all, inasmuch as he was safe to be put to death. But, lo and behold! he was pardoned; and then I penned him a letter in which I stated that under existing circumstances I did not wish to revive former rancours, but that if he himself felt in any way aggrieved towards me, I should hold myself bound to afford him satisfaction.

“And to this letter you doubtless received no answer?” said Cicely.

“None,” responded her husband. “Perhaps,” he added, with a smile, “you would like me to have shot the young fellow who dared prove indifferent to your charms?”

“As you would doubtless like to be revenged,” responded Cicely, “on that coy young demirep who seems to have been proof against your fascinations. And thus for weeks past you have been hunting after her—”

“And all in vain,” added Hector. “Let us think no more of these affairs that have failed—”

“One question I have to ask you,” said Cicely. “You observed just now that there was a *third* reason for the course which you adopted towards the Count of Camerino: but you did not tell me what this reason was.”

“Ah, I forgot!” ejaculated Hardress. “You know I wrote and told you that my father and mother passed through Turin on their way to Milan.”

“Yes,” said Cicely. “Ah! I suppose his lordship heard of your quarrel with Charles De Vere—the young Count I mean—”

“Precisely so. My father heard that I had been locked up in prison for some hours, and that De Vere was ordered at the same time to quit the city. I cannot picture to you how agitated my father was: he did not speak to me before my mother—but he took me aside, and he implored and entreated that I would renounce my animosity against De Vere. He knew that I had once before fought a duel with him: and he declared it was quite sufficient to prove our prowess to each other. I had not *then* quite made up my mind how I should act in the business; and I refused to give my father any pledge. Would you believe it, he was almost wild—he even threatened me in a manner so strange that I knew not what to think. However, at last I decided on the course I should pursue; and then my father, thinking that I had yielded only to his entreaties and to no other considerations, became as extravagant in his joy as he had been in his anger and grief. You know that he is not a man to give way to violent gusts of emotion; and therefore the scene astonished me not a little, I can tell you.”

“Yes—it was strange,” observed Cicely.

“When did you arrive here, at Boulogne?” asked Hector.

“Only yesterday afternoon,” responded his wife. “And now tell me, Hector—are you sure that you incur no risk by returning to England to stand your trial?”

“Not a bit of it—at least I hope not,” he answered, for a moment displaying a certain degree of uneasiness by a look and a gesture. “Ah, I forgot to tell you, my father and mother will be in London. They were to leave Milan on the first of January; and so we shall find them in town.”

“Are they anxious about the trial?” inquired Cicely.

“My mother is—but not my father. He knows how it must end. By the bye, how is Josephine? Where is she? Have I been half-an-hour with you, and have not once thought of inquiring after her!”

Cicely gave no immediate answer; and as her husband looked at her, wondering why she did not speak, he was struck by something peculiar in the expression of her countenance. He started and turned pale: he wondered whether Josephine could possibly have told Cicely the precise circumstances attending the death of Theodore Clifford in the field in the neighbourhood of Notting Hill?

“Is anything the matter, Cicely?” he demanded. “Did you not hear what I said?”

“Josephine is in her chamber,” responded Mrs. Hardress, with a certain dryness of tone which indicated something.

“Why—what do you mean? Is she ill? or has anything happened?” faltered out Hector.

“I do not think,” answered Cicely, “that matters are altogether right with Josephine. Indeed I scarcely know what to think—I fear to give way to thought upon the subject—”

“Good God! what do you mean?” exclaimed Hardress: and it was with difficulty he could conceal the awful terror which seized upon him.

“For the last three months,” resumed Cicely, “that is to say, ever since the duel—Josephine has been an altered creature—”

“Well,” interjected Hardress; “and was it not

enough to make an impression on her mind? By Jove! I was after all sorry that I took her to that scene! it was a shocking thing for a young girl!"—and while he thus spoke, Hector earnestly surveyed his wife's countenance, to ascertain whether she suspected the one stupendous fact connected with that awful duel.

"At first I naturally attributed her altered looks and manner to that shocking occurrence: but latterly—I really——It is a sad thing even to think of—but it would be terrible if the suspicion should be realized——"

"Good heavens! what do you mean, Cicely?" again cried Hector. "For God's sake speak!"

"You would be very angry with me, Hector, if it should turn out to be a mere surmise on my part——"

"Speak, speak! I shall not be angry!"—and tortured with suspense, he mentally ejaculated, "What in the name of God can she mean?"

"I must tell you," proceeded Cicely, still shifting and shuffling with the main question,—"I must tell you that she consulted a surgeon very mysteriously in Florence—she obtained some medicine, which she endeavoured to conceal from me—I only discovered it by accident——"

"What—what can you mean, Cicely?" and all Hector's suspicions and fears were now suddenly turned into another channel. "Do you really suppose that—that——"

"I tell you, Hector, that I am diffident in giving utterance to the idea, because if it should prove incorrect you might think I had some malicious spite or ill-will against poor Josephine."

"No, no, Cicely! But you suspect, then—you suspect——"

"That she has a second time fallen into error," rejoined Mrs. Hardress, "and that she is now in a way to become a mother."

Hector became pale as death. He himself was profligate and debauched: he had even consented to a compact whereby his own wife should have become discolate; but he was seized with rage and affliction at the idea of his sister treading the path of frailty. It was his pride that was thus deeply concerned: for if it were known that she, in her unmarried state, was a wanton, the disgrace would redound upon the entire family. It was through no moral motive that Hector was so profoundly sensitive on the point; and as for his sister's virtue, he cared nothing more for it than in so far as it was connected with the opinion of the world.

"And you think *this*, Cicely?" he said, after a pause.

"I have told you what I think, Hector. There are various little circumstances which tend to corroborate this idea——But at the same time I would not for the world that you should go and accuse Josephine point-blank, or attack her in an intemperate mood——"

"I will not do so. It is for you, Cicely, to arrive at a certainty upon the point. I must leave the matter in your hands."

"Be it so," interjected his wife. "And now let me entreat that you do not exhibit any altered demeanour towards Josephine."

"I will do nothing to make *her* suspect that *we* suspect her. Go and talk to her now—I do not wish to meet her for the present—I

will go and take a stroll—I must compose my feelings."

With these words Hector quitted the apartment; and he was about to issue forth from the hotel to lounge through the streets, when a vehicle drove into the court-yard—a young, active, good-looking valet leapt down from the box—the door of the chaise was opened—and a young gentleman clad in deep mourning alighted.

"Ah! my dear Hailes!" ejaculated Hardress, at once recognising him. "I had been thinking of you!"

"And I of you!" responded Andrew: and the two young men shook hands cordially. "I was wondering whether you meant to go and surrender to your bail——"

"Of course! Have you the same intention?" asked Hector.

"Most certainly. I am assured that there is nothing to apprehend—nothing to fear,—that as everything was fair, straightforward, and honourable——"

"Oh! yes—certainly!—there is nothing to fear!" interjected Hardress. "But you are in mourning?"

"Yes—for my uncle."

"Ah! the old gentleman is dead?"

"He died two months ago. He came abroad with me—he was taken ill at Baden—we moved to the South of France—and he breathed his last at Pau."

"And I hope," said Hardress, "that he did not disappoint whatever expectations you may have formed P—I mean in a pecuniary respect?"

"Far from it," responded Hailes. "He was a worthy old man! He left me everything. Indeed he was much richer than I could possibly have expected—I think I shall have at least eight thousand a-year when all the affairs come to be settled."

"I most sincerely congratulate you, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Hector. "By the bye, that valet of your's is an uncommon smart-looking fellow——"

"Do you think so?" observed Hailes carelessly.

"Indeed he is! so genteel—so handsome!"

"Well—I never particularly noticed him," said Andrew. "But about this duel—this trial I mean—for I cannot help thinking of it——"

"I am glad I have fallen in with you; because there are several little matters in which I may be enabled to prompt you——"

"Why, I shall not be examined in the court!" ejaculated Andrew.

"No—but in instructing counsel, I mean—in giving an account of the business to your lawyer——"

"Let us step into the hotel. Of course you are staying here?"

"Yes," replied Hardress. "My wife and——"

But here he stopped short, for he was about to add the words "my sister," when he suddenly recollected that this same sister of his was only known to Andrew Hailes as *Mr. Godolphin*, a being in masculine attire,—instead of the Hon. Miss Josephine Hardress, a young lady in female raiment. He was instantly smitten with the inconvenience of the meeting—the embarrassment of



his own situation! How could he help introducing Hailes to his sister as well as to his wife?—and yet how could he do it, with the almost certainty that Hailes must recognise the identity of Josephine with the supposed *Mr. Godolphin*? The position was indeed an awkward one: but Mr. Hailes, being very unsophisticated, did not notice Hector's embarrassment; and he hastened to say, "It is precious cold, standing here in the draught of that cursed archway: let us go into the hotel and get a private room, where we can chat together."

"By all means," said Hardress. "I would at once introduce you up to my own room—but my wife is indisposed——"

"Pray do not let me intrude," interjected Hailes. "On another occasion I may possibly have the honour of being introduced to Mrs.

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Hardress. Besides, as you are going to London forthwith, and my destination is the same, we shall be enabled to travel together?"

"Oh, certainly! certainly!" ejaculated Hector; and then he thought within himself, "Well, the only thing to be done is to leave Josephine behind to follow us at her leisure."

Hailes turned to give a few instructions to his valet—whom he addressed in the Italian tongue, and whose name appeared to be *Cesario*. Hector Hardress could not help again noticing this domestic. There was something very effeminate about him—he had not the slightest appearance of a beard—he was short of stature, of slender shape, and of very genteel appearance. Indeed, there was altogether an air of superiority about him; and Hardress thought that he must have belonged to a family that had known better days and which had

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become reduced by those political vicissitudes which are so frequently changing the fortunes of individuals upon the Continent.

In a few minutes Hailes was conducted to a sitting-apartment, to which Hector Hardress followed him. The former ordered some temporary refreshment to stay his appetite until dinner, for which he also issued his instructions; and now while disposing of his luncheon, he resumed the discourse with Hardress.

"What did you mean just now," inquired Hailes, "when you said that there were several little matters in which you might be enabled to prompt me?"

"The best course to adopt," responded Hardress, "will be for you to leave the management of your case to my attorney, who can instruct the same counsel for both of us."

"I should not have the slightest objection," answered young Hailes, "only you remember that at the time my uncle insisted on his own solicitor taking up the business so far as I was concerned."

"True!—but that was about potting in bail and that sort of thing," interrupted Hardress. "However, do as you like—Your solicitor can confer with mine—and it will come to the same thing in the end."

"By the bye," exclaimed Hailes—and then he suddenly burst out into a merry laugh.

"I am glad to see you in a jovial humour, my dear friend," said Hector. "Might I be permitted to know what it was that tickled your fancy just at the particular moment?"

"I was thinking of a certain person," replied Hailes, "who played a part in the duel-business, but whom you will scarcely think of producing at the trial."

"Whom do you mean?" asked Hector, emitted with a sudden uneasiness.

"Whom the deuce should I mean but your friend Mr. Godolphin? Ha! ha! ha!" and Andrew Hailes, throwing himself back in his chair, gave vent to another hearty outburst of laughter.

Hector coloured up to the very hair of his head, as he faltered out, "What on earth do you mean? Why—why—what makes you indulge in this playfulness?"

"It was really excellent—it was almost too good," rejoined Hailes, "to go and dress up a female in masculine apparel and make her play the part of your second in the duel! No wonder Mr. Godolphin was not forthcoming when the affair went before the magistrate! The joke was a fine one!"—and again Andrew Hailes laughed merrily.

Hector thought he had better laugh likewise; and he said, "Surely you don't know—I mean you didn't suspect anything more—"

"If you only knew the sequel!" cried Hailes.

"The sequel? What do you mean? The sequel was that you and I gave bail and went upon the Continent—though we journeyed in different directions, and lost sight of each other until accident threw us together just now."

"Ah!" said Hailes; and his countenance assumed a sly expression for a moment.

"There is something in the background," said Hardress,—“something which perhaps I really do

not know—or that you fancy I may be ignorant of, though in reality it may perhaps be quite the reverse."

"I don't think I ought to push the subject any further," said Andrew, his looks becoming serious. "Indeed it was thoughtless of me to say so much; but there was a whim in my head at the instant—the recollection of something was tickling my fancy—"

"At all events it could be nothing unpleasant," interrupted Hector, "since it afforded you so much merriment; and there can consequently be no reason why I should not be allowed to share in your mirth."

Hailes reflected for a few moments; and then he said, "If you really wish me to explain what is passing in my mind, you must let me ask you one question first."

"Proceed," said Hardress, who was experiencing a most uneasy interest in the turn which the conversation had taken.

"That girl whom you dressed up and palmed upon me as Mr. Godolphin—Of course I know very well she was a gay lady—perhaps your mistress—perhaps a wench whom you picked up out of the street to serve your purpose for the moment? Now was it?"

Hector was almost maddened with rage; and it was with the greatest difficulty he could restrain himself from starting up from his seat and making a desperate attack upon his companion. But he saw that something important was coming—a mystery had presented itself which he was most anxious to probe to the bottom; and he therefore exercised a befitting control over his feelings.

"Well," he said, "go on, Hailes—form what conjecture you like concerning the matter."

"Ah! I see, then, that I was not far astray when I estimated the fair one at such a low standard of morality—though she was certainly a very superior person for her position. The question I wished to ask is simply whether you ever see the young lady now, and whether she has any particular claim upon you, or you have any special tenderness for her?"

"And if I said that I had?" asked Hector.

"Well then, I should close my mouth and consider it my duty to abstain from uttering another syllable on the point."

"But if on the other hand," resumed Hardress, "I were to tell you that I care nothing about the girl—that all you have conjectured is correct—and that consequently it is by no means probable I should concern myself much on her behalf—Indeed, if I were to add that I have never seen her since that fatal evening, exactly three months back—"

"If you were to tell me all this," said Hailes, "I should think that it was the very statement which was most likely to be consistent with the truth."

"Take it as such," said Hardress; and he affected to smile as if with a careless sort of levity. "And now proceed without hesitation to tell me what is uppermost in your mind."

"The adventures of that evening, so far as I was concerned," pursued Andrew, "had a termination which was ludicrous enough, though by no means disagreeable. You remember how we parted?"

"Yes: it was immediately after Clifford fell."

"You bade me and the self-styled Mr. Godolphin fly—we obeyed you—we started in different directions—but it was destined that we were to meet again."

"Ah!" said Hector. "You met again? But not that same night, surely?"

"That same night—within the same hour—and at no very great distance from the scene of the duel. But you are aware that you have not before heard of this?"

"How could I," asked Hector, "when I tell you that I have not seen that young female since the night of which you are speaking? Pray therefore tell me what happened."

"I found the poor disguised girl leaning against a gate, evidently overpowered by her feelings—"

"Indeed? And then I suppose she confessed to you that she was of the gentler sex—or perhaps she fainted in your arms—or you conjectured it?"

"Nothing of all this," interrupted Hailes. "I firmly believed her to be Mr. Godolphin, whom I looked upon as a young, timid, trembling strippling who never ought to have been dragged into such a dilemma. I took her with me to a house at no great distance: I was well known at the place—for the fact is, I kept a mistress there—"

"And you introduced the young woman to your mistress? you left them together?"

"How danted fast you are getting on!" exclaimed Hailes. "Of course I introduced them: but I thought at the time that Mr. Godolphin was really what he was represented: I was still ignorant of the mystery. There was but one chamber which could be placed at our disposal; and—and—can't you imagine the rest?"

"No," said Hector: and if Hailes had not been stirring the fire at the moment, he would have been struck by the sombre expression of his companion's countenance.

"No?" he cried with a laugh. "Why, how was such an adventure to terminate otherwise than it actually did? In plain terms, the position was such—circumstances combined so singularly—that—that the delusion could be no longer sustained; and lo and behold! your Mr. Godolphin turned out to be a female!"

"And so it was then that you made the discovery?" said Hardress. "Well, perhaps you—But tell the tale after your own fashion."

"There is nothing more to tell," rejoined Hailes—"unless you are so dull that I must become still more circumstantial and tell you how I was infinitely delighted with the discovery. I wanted something to cheer and amuse me—I was depressed and horrified at the recollection of the tragedy—"

"And therefore," said Hardress, with a forced laugh, "you took advantage of the piece of good luck which was thus thrown in your way?"

"Of course I did. The girl pretended to be coy and bashful: but I was not to be duped any more: I knew very well that there could be neither modesty nor morality to any extraordinary extent on the part of a young female who dressed herself up in male apparel and plunged headlong into such adventures. There was certainly one thing which surprised me at the time, and which I had since forgotten until now—"

"And what was that?" inquired Hardress.

"Oh! only that on the following morning my fair companion sent a note, by my mistress Lietta, to your wife: but I accounted for it by the supposition that you had on the preceding evening introduced the girl to Mrs. Hardress when you were setting out to fight the duel."

"Yes—it was something of the sort—I forget exactly how it happened now," stammered Hector, whose breast was a perfect pandemonium raging with the fiercest and darkest passions. "One is compelled to do extraordinary or unpleasant things under particular circumstances. But I shall leave you now for the present—I have some little business to attend to in Boulogne—We shall see each other again in the evening."

"I shall be very happy," answered Hailes. "I have no other acquaintances in the town, and should be dull if you were not to look in upon me for half-an-hour or so."

Meanwhile Cesario, the genteel-looking valet, had superintended the conveyance of his young master's luggage to his bed-chamber; and he was passing along a corridor on his way to the room which had been allotted to his own use, when he beheld a lady issue from a neighbouring apartment. He stepped politely aside to make way for this lady, when he was struck by her countenance. He gazed upon her earnestly; and a singular expression seized upon his features as he seemed to recognise the face of the lady of whom we are speaking. She did not notice the sensation which her presence thus produced: she merely flung a transient glance upon the handsome genteel-looking valet; and she continued her way along the corridor. She was descending the stairs to seek the sitting-apartment, when she was met by Hector Hardress, who was springing up those stairs two or three steps at a time.

"Ah, Josephine?" he said: "'tis well met! I want to speak to you particularly."

"To me, Hector?" and the young lady started, turned pale, and even appeared to stagger back a pace or two.

"Yes—to you. Where is your room? We had better be alone together—I do not want to speak before Cicely for the present."

Josephine Hardress threw a frightened look of inquiry upon her brother: then a strange expression, woe-begone and desperate, settled upon her naturally handsome countenance; and she led the way to her own apartment, into which she was closely followed by Hector.

Whether it were that Andrew Hailes's genteel-looking valet, Cesario, had some important reason for watching the movements of Josephine Hardress—or whether it were that he was inspired only by a feeling of impertinent curiosity—we are unable at this moment to decide: but certain it is that she had no sooner passed into her chamber, followed by her brother, than Cesario, gliding along from the obscurity at the other end of the passage, stole up to the door of that room, and applying his ear to the keyhole, drank in as much as he could thus possibly glean of the discourse which took place inside.

But leaving the valet outside the door, we must penetrate into the room itself, and describe the scene that now took place between the brother and sister. The moment Hector had closed the door

he confronted Josephine, saying with all the abruptness of an accusation that was intended to surprise the accused into an admission of the truth, "Unhappy girl! you are in a way to become a mother!"

Josephine coloured—then sat down upon a sofa—and gazed with a sort of vacancy upon her brother, without uttering a word.

"You know that it is so," proceeded Hector: "but after all, your position is not a desperate one. No—there is a hope—nay, more, if the affair be well managed there is a certainty that you may become an honourably wedded woman—Yes, and wedded too to the father of the child which you bear in your bosom!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Josephine; and then she inquired, "But how did you find out all this?"

"First tell me, Josephine, whether I am right in supposing that in naming Andrew Hailes I mention the individual who is bound to make you an honourable woman?"

"Yes—'tis he!" ejaculated the Hon. Miss Hardress. "Now I see that you know everything! But how?"

"Andrew Hailes is here. He arrived at the hotel just now—I have been conversing with him. But answer me one question, Josephine! In the morning after you passed the night with that young man, you sent a message to Cicely?"

"Yes—a note. It was to assure her that I had chanced to find a respectable lodging, and to beg that she would let my father and mother suppose 'that I had been staying with her—that I was ill and excited on account of hearing of the duel—and that she had set up with me all night.'"

"True! I know that Cicely gave such an account in order to screen you," observed Hector. "And you assure me that Cicely remained in ignorance of the real manner in which you passed that night?"

"Most assuredly. Think you that I should have confessed it? No! But tell me," asked Josephine, quickly, "does Cicely suspect anything?"

"She suspects that you are in a way to become a mother; and now of course she must be told everything!"

"Told everything?" echoed Josephine, almost with a scream of terror. "What! would you tell her that when your shot failed to level the villain Theodore Clifford, it was my hand which then did the fatal work? Oh! will you tell Cicely this? need it be mentioned to a third person that you gave me a pistol—that I concealed it under my cloak—that I discharged it? Oh, Hailes himself proclaimed at the instant that he fancied he heard the report of a *third* weapon!"

"Hush! for God's sake hush!" interrupted Hector impatiently: for his sister had gone on with increasing excitement and vehemence as in imagination she contemplated the terrible tragedy in the enactment of which she had borne so large a part.

"Ah! I was incautious!" she said, flinging her frightened looks around the room; "for the very walls have ears to drink in the confession of such a hideous crime as this!"

"Be reasonable, Josephine! be composed! It is not necessary that Cicely should learn the *whole* fact whereunto you have been alluding. It is a

secret that must subsist entirely between you and me! Aye, even when you become the wife of young Hailes—a consummation which *must* be brought about—you will be careful ever to retain the seal of secrecy upon your lips! But what I just now meant in respect to Cicely, was that we must entrust her with the secret of all that passed between Hailes and yourself; because it may be possible that her succour may be needed in order to bring about the match which is now so desirable. And after all it will not be a bad one for you, Josephine—at least in a pecuniary sense. His uncle is dead—he has got eight thousand a year—and though it will be an awkward thing for you to become a mother six months or so after marriage——"

"Ah!" said Josephine, bitterly; "my life was destined to be one of shame, and crime, and degradation! Think you that on the memorable night to which we have been so frequently alluding—think you that immediately after that tragedy, with the spectacle of the murdered man before my mental vision, I was so carried away by wanton passions that I willingly or readily abandoned myself to the arms of that young man? Not so! I was crushed by a complication of circumstances—I was thrown into his power—left at his mercy! I implored and entreated that he would be generous and forbearing: he laughed at my prayers—and—and—I dared not resist—the police were about the premises—there was one who dwelt beneath the very roof itself—or else who was a visitor there—I forget which—but I was beset with the direst terrors—the gibbet itself seemed to be looming in the distance—I dared not cry out, nor draw attention thither——"

"Enough! enough, Josephine!" interrupted Hector. "Yet one word more! Am I to understand that Hailes used violence?"

"Again I ask," demanded Josephine, almost indignantly, "if you think that I was so depraved—so lost to all sense of decency as to yield to wanton feelings on such an occasion as *that*?"

"It is now, therefore, all the more certain," said Hardress, gloomily, "that Andrew Hailes must become your husband! But the business shall be managed with caution and with policy. Cicely and I will cross over to England to-morrow morning; and Hailes shall accompany us. You must remain behind: you can follow on the ensuing day. Leave all the rest to me."

A little more conversation took place between the brother and sister; but it is not necessary to place it on record; and the very instant that Hector approached the door in order to issue from that chamber, Cesario, who had been listening the whole time at the keyhole, glided noiselessly away towards the extremity of the passage.

Hector proceeded to rejoin his wife, to whom he communicated the fact that it was as she had suspected with Josephine, and that Hailes was the author of her disgrace. He likewise explained the arrangements he had made,—adding, "I will presently introduce Hailes to you; and of course you will receive him with the utmost politeness. He need not know that my sister is with us: or if he should happen to learn the fact, we can easily inform him that she is confined by indisposition to her chamber. They must not meet until we are in London. For we can do nothing

here—he might laugh at my threats—he would invoke the aid of the French authorities—and, in short, he would be enabled to set us at complete defiance.”

Hector and his wife thoroughly discussed all the details of the course which was to be pursued; and after dinner a message was sent by one of the waiters, inviting Mr. Hailes to take dessert with Mr. and Mrs. Hardress. The young gentleman quickly made his appearance; and he was duly presented to Cicely. She proposed that he should accompany them to London on the morrow; and he readily gave his assent—for he felt flattered by the idea of travelling with the Hon. Hector Hardress, and he was delighted with the fascinations of Cicely's manners.

To be brief, therefore, Andrew Hailes embarked with Mr. and Mrs. Hardress on the following day. They crossed to Folkestone; and thence they repaired by the railway to London. Josephine remained behind at Boulogne. The valet Cesario attended his master to the metropolis, where Hailes proceeded to take up his abode at an hotel. Hector and Cicely returned to their villa at Bayewater; and on the ensuing day they were rejoined by Josephine.

“Now is the time for action!” thought Hector to himself, as he prepared to pay a visit to Andrew Hailes, and carry out the plan which he had conceived on Josephine's behalf.

At the same time Cicely went to call upon her aunt Mrs. Timperley in Lincoln's Inn Fields; and she agreed to accompany her afflicted kinswoman to the goal of Newgate, in order that she might see her uncle who lay there under a charge of murder.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

MR. TIMPERLEY IN NEWGATE.

MRS. TIMPERLEY has figured so little upon the stage of our story, and so long a period has elapsed since she was even mentioned, that the reader may have forgotten what sort of a personage she was. We may therefore as well remind him that she was between fifty and sixty years of age—that is to say, some ten years younger than the lawyer himself; that they had been married since their youthful period—that she was descended from a highly respectable family—and that she was of lady-like manners, tastes, and habits. As a matter of course she had not been married for seven-and-thirty years to such a man as Timperley without having been more or less infected with the contaminating influences of his polluted mind: but still he had always kept her as much as possible in the dark with regard to the questionable sides of his business: he had never let her know more than he was actually compelled to reveal to her; and thus she was very far from suspecting that he even stood the risk of being accused of so dreadful a crime as that of murder, until the awful intelligence itself broke upon her as if a thunderbolt had fallen at her feet.

From something that we have just said, it may be readily conceived that Mrs. Timperley was tolerably well aware her husband was not too largely

endowed with human virtues, but that on the other hand he was sadly lacking in good principles and useful moral scruples: still she was by no means inclined to think him capable of such colossal guilt as that of which he was now accused. Notwithstanding that the examination before the magistrate at the period of his committal for trial, had necessarily revealed the main features of the evidence on which the charge against him rested, Mrs. Timperley could not conscientiously persuade herself that it was otherwise than a mere circumstantial combination of testimonies which tended to make her husband a martyr instead of proving him to be a criminal. Two months had now elapsed since he was committed to Newgate. It was in the middle of November when he was arrested; and as the December Sessions of the Central Criminal Court were then so nigh at hand, the demand of counsel for the postponement of the trial was as a matter of course immediately granted. It was now the middle of January; and on some fresh plea, which it is not worth while to record, the trial was again ordered to be postponed for a month. Mrs. Timperley was more than ever fixed in her resolve to believe her husband innocent, inasmuch as he himself assured her that the motive which he had for delaying the trial was for the purpose of procuring additional testimony in his defence.

Cicely, as the reader well knows, was perfectly convinced of Mr. Timperley's guilt. She had known it almost from the very first; she had used the secret as a means of exacting from him a fortune. She was abroad when his arrest took place; and instead of speeding to England to comfort her aunt, she had written to plead indisposition and a variety of other excuses for thus remaining absent. Mrs. Timperley believed her; and thus when they now met in length met in London, there was no ill-will on the part of the aunt towards the niece. Mrs. Timperley, be it understood, was utterly ignorant of the means that Cicely had adopted, some fourteen months back, to obtain thirty thousand pounds from the lawyer: she thought that Mr. Timperley had given her that sum from a pure feeling of affection and good will; and the aunt was therefore all the more disposed, on this very account, to recognise as many good qualities as possible on the part of her niece. Cicely had felt that she had somewhat a difficult game to play; she could not possibly tell her aunt that she believed, and even *knew*, her uncle to be guilty: she was not sure whether in the long run her own name might not be mixed up with the details of the evidence which, chiefly through the agency of the woman Maddox, had been brought to bear upon the lawyer; and she experienced the necessity of adopting a prudent course. Be it well understood that she had an eye to the heritage of whatsoever wealth Mr. Timperley might leave her aunt; and her object was to stand well in every quarter where her interests could possibly be compromised or concerned. Without, therefore, giving her aunt any assurances of her belief in Mr. Timperley's innocence—inasmuch as subsequent events might possibly prove her knowledge of his guilt, and show her to be a hypocrite—she launched forth into consolations of a general character, and exhibited the utmost readiness to go and visit her “poor uncle” in his dungeon,

These were the circumstances under which the visit was now paid to Mr. Timperley. This man, having gone through many vicissitudes, and having risen to effluence—having indeed, by various means, achieved for himself a considerable amount of prosperity—seemed destined to close his career in ignominy and by a violent death. Midway between sixty and seventy years of age—at a time when, if his actions had been straightforward, or at all events less criminal than they were, he might have been reposing in the lap of luxury, in a comfortable home, surrounded by all things that riches could purchase,—how different was it! There he was, in a felon's gaol, with the blackest charge and the direst penalty hanging over his head—knowing himself to be guilty, and having likewise the hideous certainty that his turpitude would be brought home to him! He was a man of too much sagacity, and he was too cunning as a lawyer, to buoy himself up with the hope that the evidence would break down against him, or that he could by any possible loophole escape from condemnation. Death was therefore staring him in the face: but still he persisted in the assertion of his innocence, because he was a man with more or less courage of a particular sort, and he was resolved to look the world with hardihood in the face so long as he should remain a denizen of it. He knew that there was nothing to be gained by confession; and as he possessed little or no religious principle, it was not on *this* account that he was at all likely to avow himself a culprit.

On arriving at Newgate, Mrs. Timperley and the Hon. Mrs. Hardress were at once conducted to the cell in which the prisoner was confined. Being as yet untried, he did not wear irons; and whereas in ordinary cases the relations of a captive would have been compelled to speak to him through the iron bars of a grating, the rigidity of the gaol discipline was now mitigated in consideration of the *Honourable* that was prefixed to Cicely's name. Indeed this was the first time that Mrs. Timperley herself had been enabled to see her husband in his own cell, except when she came with an order from one of the visiting magistrates to that effect.

Timperley did not seem to have suffered very much from his two months' imprisonment:—indeed there was but little alteration in his personal appearance since Cicely had last seen him; and from the observations which we have just made concerning him, it may readily be supposed that there was no evidence of contrition, nor guilty terror, nor yielding weakness in his demeanour or his speech.

Mrs. Timperley began to cry when Cicely affected to embrace the prisoner with much distress and affliction; and he hastily whispered in her ear, "You and I understand each other well enough, Cicely! You must manage that I have some private conversation with you presently."

"It is for you to contrive it," hastily responded Mrs. Hardress, speaking in the same low tone; "and whatever service I can render, you may reckon upon me!"

"Good!" said the prisoner. "Come, my dear," he went on to exclaim, now turning towards his wife; "don't take on so. You know I have told you over and over again——"

"Yes," she cried, starting up from the seat on which she had ere now sunk down: "you have

assured me of your innocence—and I have never for a moment doubted it! You are the victim of circumstances! But you must show the world that you know how to conquer its malignity—you must prove that a guiltless man cannot be ridden roughshod over by the law—and you must come out of this dreadful place in triumph, to return to your own comfortable house in the Fields!"

Mrs. Timperley had spoken with great excitement and considerable volubility of utterance: her husband pretended to be very much affected by her discourse—while Cicely turned aside as if to conceal her tears, though not so much as a single drop trickled from her eyes.

"For thirty-seven years have you and I been husband and wife," continued Mrs. Timperley renewing her impassioned address to the captive; "and I don't think that you can say that there has ever been a serious quarrel between us through any fault of mine. And I must say that all things considered, you have been a very good husband to me. When we were poor we clung to one another; when we grew rich we together partook of the pleasures and recreations that wealth afforded. And now they want to take you from me! But they shall not! they shall not! Look, Cicely, look! there is a victim, and not a culprit! a martyr, and not a criminal!"

Having thus spoken, Mrs. Timperley again threw herself distractedly upon the seat; and burying her face in her kerchief, she gave way to a paroxysm of passionate weeping and sobbing.

"Cicely," the lawyer now hastily whispered, "I have made everything over to my wife under a trusteeship—she will only have a life interest in my property—and at her death it is all to go to you!"

"Well, uncle—and what can I do for you?" asked the young lady, who was fully convinced that some signal service was required at her hands.

"I knew you would come at about the time your husband's trial was fixed to take place," he proceeded; "and so I waited for you. There is a service you can render me—a service which you only perhaps on the face of the earth would be willing to undertake on my behalf. I could not ask *her*"—and he glanced towards his wife, who was rocking herself to and fro, distracted with grief, and still holding the white kerchief up to her countenance.

"Quick, uncle! explain yourself!" whispered Cicely.

"I cannot die upon the scaffold," he responded; "neither do I choose to meet the ordeal of a trial. I am a doomed man—and the sooner I leave a world to which nothing now of a hopeful character retains me, the better!"

"Ah!" said Cicely: and a certain vague suspicion which had before begun to float in her mind grew stronger and more palpable.

"Well, perhaps you understand me," proceeded Timperley. "Poison, Cicely, poison! No matter of what kind, so long as it is certain and speedy! You understand, Cicely? you understand?" he added, with the deepest emphasis, though he was speaking in the lowest possible whisper:—"certain and speedy!"

"I run a risk in undertaking such a task as this," said Mrs. Hardress.

"None, I will show you how. Disguise your-

self, and procure the poison in some remote and obscure quarter of the town—Get small quantities at two or three different shops, if needful—Multiply your precautions if you will!"

"This can be done," replied Cicely. "But how to convey the poison to you? If I come to you again I might be suspected."

"You need not come again," interrupted Timperley: "everything can be otherwise arranged—aye, and in a manner that shall utterly bewilder the gaol authorities as to the person whom they are to suspect of bringing me the means of death."

"Proceed! proceed!" said Cicely, glancing towards her aunt, who seemed as if she were recovering from the violent fit of affliction into which she had fallen.

"Tell your father-in-law, Lord Mendlesham, that I wish to see him particularly—tell him that he must come. Deliver this message secretly—let no one know of it besides him into whose ear it is to be whispered. He will not refuse; and surely, surely, Cicely, you have tact enough to induce him on some pretext or another to become the hearer of a small packet? Tell him it is snuff—anything, in short—"

"Yes—this can be managed, no doubt!" said Cicely. "But one word more!"

"Ah!" interjected the prisoner, with one of those half-sinister significant looks which were so characteristic of him. "I understand you! Call upon Mr. Campbell, the lawyer next door to my house in Lincoln's Inn Fields—and he will show you the draft of the deed which has been duly prepared and which only requires my signature. The instant that Lord Mendlesham shall have been to me, I will send for Campbell and will sign the paper. But if you deceive or disappoint me, I will leave everything in such a way that at your aunt's death it shall go to a hospital! Now do you understand me?"

"I do. It is a bargain," replied Cicely; "and you may reckon upon my share of the compact being fulfilled. I shall not see you again—though as a matter of course we shall presently part as if I were to return in a few days."

"Hush! your aunt!"

"Cicely my dear," said Mrs. Timperley. "I hope that you have been administering consolations—"

"Nothing can be more consoling," interrupted the lawyer, "than the discourse which I have had with Cicely. She is a good girl—and whatever may happen to me, Mrs. Timperley—whether now or later—whether as the result of this unfortunate business, or in the ordinary course of nature, Cicely must inherit everything we possess!"

"Don't talk of it now, Thomas! I don't talk of it now!" sobbed the lady, with another outburst of grief, during which Timperley bent a look of the most sinister significance upon Mrs. Hardress, whispering in a low hoarse voice, "Remember, Cicely! take care of the game you play! A fortune is at stake for you!"

"If I did not mean to fulfil my pledge, I should tell you so candidly at once," replied Cicely.

"And now, my dear," said the prisoner to his wife, "I think you had better leave me for the present, and take dear Cicely away with you. She is much affected—In fact, we are all three affected—"

"When shall we come again?" sobbed Mrs. Timperley.

"When? Oh! the day after to-morrow, at about the same time," rejoined the prisoner. "And now good bye, good bye."

It was thus that he cut short the leave-taking, as if it were something more than his feelings could endure; and as the turnkey came to open the door of the cell, Cicely exclaimed in a voice which sounded as if it were broken with grief, "We shall come again, uncle, the day after to-morrow."

In the evening Mrs. Hardress—dressed in the plainest attire, and wearing a thick veil over her countenance—descended the private staircase which led from the vicinage of her boudoir down into the garden, and to which allusion has before been made in those chapters that treated of the circumstances attending the duel which terminated so fatally for Theodore Clifford. Thus disguised, Mrs. Hardress visited three or four chemists' shops in different parts of the metropolis; and at each she purchased a very small quantity of laudanum, pretending that it was for the toothache. In no instance was the quantity thus purchased sufficient to destroy life; and as if the precautions thus taken were not sufficient, Cicely shifted a black mantle over her shawl, or the shawl over the mantle, and changed her black veil for a green one, in the intervals between the visits which she paid to the respective chemists' shops. Finally she returned to the villa at Bayewater, confident that she had accomplished the undertaking without incurring the slightest suspicion of any sinister design, or leaving a clue to the detection of who she really was.

But here we must take leave of Mrs. Hardress for the present, and follow in the footsteps of her husband Hector, who had set off to pay a visit to Andrew Hailes at the same time that Cicely had gone to see her aunt in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and subsequently her uncle in Newgate.

Mr. Hailes was seated in his apartment at the hotel where he had taken up his quarters. A very handsome French dressing-gown loosely wrapped his form, as he sat, or rather half reclined himself in an easy chair; for he was smoking a meerschaum after luncheon, this being about two o'clock in the afternoon. There was a small anteroom, in which Hector Hardress found the valet Cesario leaning with a negligent air on the window-sill, and looking down into the street; so that he did not immediately observe the visitor's presence, the out-door of the suite having stood open.

"Is your master within?" demanded Hector, speaking in Italian; for he was not aware that the valet understood English.

Cesario turned towards him, and for a moment gave a start and flung a strange look upon Hector; but the latter, thinking it was merely the natural confusion of the youth at being surprised in that negligent posture, took no farther heed of the circumstance.

"Yes, signor—my master is within;" and immediately throwing open the inner door, the valet announced the Hon. Mr. Hardress.

"Ah, my dear fellow," cried Hailes, "I am delighted to see you! Pray sit down."

"We have a great deal to talk about," said Hector, grasping the youth's hand.

"Then perhaps you will stay to dine with me? We will take a stroll presently together, and return to dinner at six. Will that suit you?"

"It will suit me excellently," rejoined Hardress,—"all except the stroll; for in the first instance you must come with me to my lawyer."

"And my lawyer is anxious to see you!" exclaimed Andrew. "I had almost forgotten it."

"Then we will pay these two visits," said Hardress; "and we will return to dinner at six o'clock, as you propose."

The waiter was summoned, and Hailes gave him instructions to see that dinner was in readiness at the hour named: then to Cesario he said, "I am going to make a couple of calls with Mr. Hardress, and we shall dine together on my return at six o'clock."

Cesario made no reply, but walked slowly and even hesitatingly out of the room; so that Hector, turning towards Hailes, said, "That is somewhat a singular youth of your's!—he might be a trifle more respectful, methinks."

"Ah!" said Hailes, colouring for an instant; and then he added with a careless air, "He is a well-meaning young fellow, and is very much attached to me."

The two young gentlemen entered a cab; and Hardress said, "We will proceed in the first instance to your solicitor's;"—for he was nervously anxious to see the issue of this part of the business.

The requisite instructions were given to the cabman; and in due time the vehicle stopped at a house in Bloomsbury Square. Mr. Bowman, the lawyer, was in his office; and thither Hailes and Hardress were immediately conducted by one of the clerks.

"I am glad you have come, Mr. Hardress," said Mr. Bowman. "This is an unpleasant business; and it is requisite to be prepared for all contingencies. My client Mr. Hailes will excuse me for saying that he is only a mere boy—he is scarcely twenty years of age—a minor—and though not precisely under my guardianship, yet still more or less under my care; for his deceased uncle was an intimate friend of mine——"

"Well, Mr. Bowman," interjected Hardress, assuming the most affable demeanour, for in reality he did not altogether like the lawyer's opening speech; "I am excessively sorry that your client—whom I am proud to call my friend—should have become involved in such a dilemma——"

"This does not appear to have been your fault, Mr. Hardress," said Bowman. "It was the deceased Mr. Clifford who dragged Andrew into the business. As a matter of course, you are now both equally interested in making your defence as clear as possible, and convincing the Jury that everything was fair and straightforward—that all the formalities were fulfilled—that seconds and surgeon were in attendance——"

"No doubt!" said Hector. "Are there any details, Mr. Bowman, in which I can assist you?"

"In the first place," inquired the lawyer, "is there a chance of Mr. Godolphin coming forward?"

Hailes turned aside and coughed. Hector coloured deeply for an instant; and then said, "I'm afraid there is no chance, Mr. Bowman."

"It would look infinitely more straightforward

and honourable," exclaimed the lawyer, "if all the parties concerned were to surrender to take their trial. Mr. Godolphin was your second, Mr. Hardress; and you ought to have done your best to produce him. I am really afraid that it will be thought there is something mystical about this gentleman; for he has never been heard of from the instant of the duel. A warrant was issued for his apprehension, as he did not surrender to put in bail; and the police cannot discover the faintest clue to the individual. He is known at none of the clubs—at none of the West End hotels—at none of the fashionable resorts——"

"He was a mere stranger upon town," ejaculated Hardress; while Hailes walked to the window and pretended to look out in order to conceal his laughter.

"Of course, my dear sir, I do not wish to prejudice your case," resumed Mr. Bowman, "because in so doing I should prejudice that of my own client Mr. Hailes. But really I cannot help thinking that it is unhandsome—it is even mysterious—it is strange on your part, Mr. Hardress, that you do not take prompt measures to bring this Mr. Godolphin forward. You know that by so doing you would involve him in no real trouble; but on the contrary you would be rendering him a service—you would be getting him through the business at the same time as yourself—and I can assure you that you would be wonderfully improving your own case. It is my duty to do all I can in the matter to ensure the safety and honourable acquittal of my young friend and client Andrew; and I feel that it will be making sure doubly sure if Mr. Godolphin be brought forward."

"My lawyer," said Hardress, "thinks it quite unnecessary that Godolphin should be produced, if it better suits his purpose to remain away."

"Then your lawyer, Mr. Hardress," responded Mr. Bowman, drily, "must have given his opinion rather than that it might assort with your own suggestions and wishes, than because he himself could possibly be convinced that the point is immaterial. In one word, can Godolphin be produced? or can he not? Be so kind as to let me know for certain, that I may act accordingly."

"I really do think, Mr. Bowman," said Hailes, now putting on a most serious countenance, "that from all my friend Hardress has told me, it is impossible to produce Godolphin; for he is upon the Continent."

"Very good," said the lawyer: but there was a certain suspicious dryness in his manner: "that is an answer—and I must take it. I will do the best I can for you, Andrew. Good afternoon, Mr. Hardress."

The two young gentlemen issued from the lawyer's office; and when they were again seated in the cab, Hailes threw himself back and burst forth into the merriest peal of laughter.

A diabolical expression of malignant rage, instantaneously followed by a smile of sardonic triumph, appeared upon the countenance of Hector Hardress: but these evidences of internal emotion passed unnoticed by Hailes, whose merriment was prolonged and even boisterous.

"You will see that my lawyer," said Hardress, "presently will tell a very different tale and prove to you that it is by no means necessary for us to



trouble ourselves about the person who was known as Godolphin."

There was another peal of laughter from Andrew's lips; and again did an expression of concentrated rage sweep over the features of his companion.

The visit was paid to Hector's attorney; but it is not necessary to detail the conversation which took place with this individual. Suffice it to say that he gave in respect to the mythical Mr. Godolphin the assurances whereof Hector had spoken; and as the weak mind of Andrew Hailes was always most susceptible of the last impression that was made upon it, in preference to a former one, he felt perfectly at his ease on this particular point.

The two young gentlemen returned to the hotel, after having taken a stroll through some of the principal streets of the West End; and dinner was served up punctually at six o'clock. The

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valet Cesario did not wait at table: his position was no doubt deemed to be too exalted a one for such a menial office; but he remained in the ante-room, and two or three times he entered the parlour, walked slowly round, and cast his eye upon the table to assure himself that his master had all he required and wanted for nothing. At length the dinner was over—the dessert was placed upon the table—the waiters withdrew—and Hardress said to himself, "Now the moment approaches! Over the wine we can discuss the subject! The opportunity is a good one; for when he gets a few glasses in his head he will become sentimentally maudlin and therefore all the more tractable."

Cesario again looked into the room; and Hardress said to Hailes, "That young fellow of your's is very attentive, after all. I was inclined just now to be prejudiced against him. You had better tell him that he may go and amuse himself

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for the next two or three hours, as we shall not want him here."

Cesario was standing at the sideboard with his back towards Hardress as the latter thus spoke; and Hailes gave a peculiar smile as he glanced towards his valet. He then said in Italian, "I shall not want you, Cesario, any more for the present."

The valet made no answer, but slowly quitted the room.

"What made you smile so strangely?" inquired Hardress, as soon as the door closed behind Cesario. "Does that young fellow happen to speak English?"

"I don't know—I think not—at least I should conceive not—but I really never asked him; and I'm sure I never tried him; because as I myself can speak Italian as well as my own native tongue——"

"To be sure!" interjected Hardress: "you always address your Italian servant in the Italian language. Well, it is no matter. Come, let us fill our glasses."

This was done; the glasses were emptied—the conversation was pursued on general topics for a few minutes, until Hailes abruptly exclaimed, "How obstinate old Bowman was about insisting on the production of the supposed Mr. Godolphin!"

"Fig-headed to a degree," responded Hardress. "It is simply ridiculous to suppose that the presence or absence of the other party to the duel can materially affect your case or mine. By the bye, I suppose," added Hardress, as if with a careless air, "that Bowman has got your pecuniary affairs in hand?"

"Yes—to a certain extent: but he has no control over them. He is an old friend of my family—he is a very respectable man—and his father was established before him in the same house in Bloomsbury Square. But I say, Hardress, wouldn't he be pleased if he could just lay his hand upon the shoulder of the young lady who played the part of Mr. Godolphin?"

"Why, it would play the deuce with me and my case!" cried Hector, with a start.

"He wouldn't care one fig about that," rejoined Hailes, "so long as he thought he could make my case at all the better. I know very well what he means. His object would be to show that I was such a greenhorn and a dupe in the whole affair——"

"Very well," interrupted Hardress impatiently: "what is the use of discussing the business?"

"Oh, none at all, if you like to change the discourse," replied the young man, sipping his wine.

There was a brief silence, during which the glasses were again filled; and then Hardress said, "You are a lucky fellow, my dear Hailes, to inherit such a fine income as eight thousand a-year. With such a fortune, and with your good looks, you ought to think of marrying well."

"There is plenty of time for that," replied Andrew. "Nevertheless, if I saw a good chance——"

"To be candid with you, my dear friend," interjected Hardress, "you only want one thing in order to be enabled to command a position in the highest circles of fashion."

"Ah! what is that?" ejaculated Hailes, with a visible excitement; for his weak point was now

being touched upon. "What do you mean? what is it that I want?"

"An aristocratic alliance—a marriage with some female scion of the patrician order—a union with the daughter of some titled and ancient house!"—and Hector emphasized his words.

"Poor Clifford used to tell me the same thing," observed Hailes. "He even went further. He was kind enough to offer to introduce me into certain good families, where I might have stood a chance——"

"No doubt of it!" exclaimed Hardress. "What if I were to do the same thing for you? what if I were even to introduce you to the very young lady that would best suit you? In short, my dear friend, what if I had already got my mental eye fixed upon the being who is destined to become your wife?"

"You are joking, Hardress!"

"I never was more serious in my life."

"But the young lady to whom you allude?" ejaculated Hailes, becoming more and more excited.

"She is the daughter of a peer—she has consequently the prefix of *Honourable*. She is very beautiful—and what is more, she is desperately in love with you."

"Ah! now I know that you really are jesting," cried Hailes, with a look of disappointment.

"I tell you that I am serious: I swear to you that I am! To be brief, Andrew, what should you think if I were to add that I am all the time alluding to my own sister Josephine?"

Andrew's eyes kindled with delight: but the next moment an expression of incredulity swept over his countenance—and he said, "This is too bad of you, Hardress! I never saw the young lady to my knowledge!—she has never seen me!—and although I have heard her spoken of as eminently beautiful——"

"Why will you think I am jesting on so serious a subject?" interrupted Hector. "My sister has seen you—you have seen her—and report has not spoken untruthfully when it has declared that she is strikingly handsome. I, as her brother, can add that she is accomplished—and, in short, she shall become your wife!"

"A thousand thanks, my dear friend!" cried Hailes, grasping Hector's hand and pressing it warmly. "But you tell me that I have had the honour of attracting the notice of the Hon. Miss Hardress?"

"Such is the fact. To be candid with you, my dear fellow, there have been certain mysteries which must now be cleared up. You are an honourable man—I should like to have you as a brother-in-law—Josephine is ready to receive you as her husband—and by means of this alliance you will immediately make your way into all the best circles."

"A mystery?—what mystery can there be?" said Hailes, feeling strangely perplexed, although he was also inclined to abandon himself to feelings of joy. "I wish you would be more explicit. I can see there is something lurking in your mind which you have got to tell me——"

"Do you suspect nothing?" demanded Hector abruptly.

"Nothing. What can I suspect? You are bewildering me!"

"I wish I had a portrait of my sister here," said Hardress, as if in a musing tone; "I would show it to you. Picture to yourself a lady nearly twenty-two years of age—tall and well formed—with regular features—large blue eyes, whose general expression is that of soft pensiveness—lips of vivid red—teeth of pearl—and with such an air of sweetness and innocence in her features that one would never fancy—I mean——"

"Well, this is a beautiful portrait that you are drawing! The complexion?"

"Is transparently fair: the hair is auburn, and remarkably glossy. I should add that her bust is superbly modelled."

"Good heavens! what a singular idea has just struck me!" ejaculated Hailes. "But not it is ridiculous! it is preposterous! And yet—auburn hair—fine bust—age twenty-two——"

"What do you mean? what idea?" cried Hector quickly.

"Nay—I never could tell you! Besides, it would be as insulting as it would be outrageous!"

"Andrew," said Hardress, impressively, "if under peculiar circumstances a beautiful woman had surrendered herself to you—if ever since that moment she had cherished your image as that of the very man whom she could fondly love—if her heart be sincerely devoted to you—and what is more, if she bear in her bosom a being that will some day require a father's name—and you that father——"

"Hardress! is this possible?" and Hailes sprang up to his feet with the wildest amazement depicted on his countenance.

"It is possible!—it is the fact!" rejoined Hector. "And now you know what I mean—you know how it is that my sister loves you! You have a duty to perform—you are a man of honour—and you will accomplish it!"

Hailes was so confounded that he could make no answer.

"And what is more," proceeded Hardress, "you will be marrying into a good family——"

"One word!" interrupted Hailes. "How was it that your sister became your second on that terrible night?"

"How? Oh! she and my wife were dressed to go to a masquerade—I think it was at my father's house—but Cicely can tell you all about it—— And then, as the circumstances leading to the duel suddenly arose, and I stood in need of a second, and there was always something chivalrous and heroic as well as singularly romantic in Josephine's character——"

"Romantic indeed!" murmured Hailes. "Now look you, Mr. Hardress! Under other circumstances I should be proud and flattered by the prospect of such an alliance: but——"

"Do not use that word!" exclaimed Hector. "You will marry Josephine. You outraged her! When I just now spoke as if she had abandoned herself unto you, it was an error on my part; for I knew the whole truth——You used violence——"

"Why, I looked upon her——though I do not wish to say anything offensive to you——I looked upon her——"

"Take care!" ejaculated Hardress. "Your lips have already given utterance to language in reference to my sister which has made my blood boil

and tingle down to the very tips of my fingers! She has been dishonoured by you—you are the father of the child which she bears in her bosom—and you shall marry her! I, her brother, demand this satisfaction on her account!"

"Good God!" ejaculated Hailes, "it seems to me like a dream! I must consult my friends—I must speak to Bowman——"

"You will speak to nobody!" interjected Hardress fiercely. "You are not a child—you are the master of your own actions. Whether I am myself to be trifled with, you best can tell; for you witnessed the duel wherein Clifford fell! Again I declare that as the brother of that outraged young lady——"

"But, my dear Hardress——"

"Yes—you shall address me in familiar terms when you have solemnly sworn by all your hopes of salvation hereafter—by the great God whom you worship—by all things sacred—that you will to-morrow wed my sister. Swear this, and then come with me to my abode, where my wife will receive you with a cordial welcome, and Josephine with open arms."

"No: I cannot swear! I cannot go with you—at least not now," faltered Hailes.

"Then by heaven," vociferated Hardress furiously, "you shall bitterly repent——"

"Do not be angry! do not fly into a rage!" cried Andrew, trembling. "You want everything done in such a hurry! you almost seem as if you meant to bully me into a certain proceeding!"

"Bully? That word to me!" and Hector was at this instant more than ever playing the part which he appeared to denounce with indignation. "You dare not call me a bully! Let us understand each other!" and he produced a pair of pistols.

"What!"—and Andrew recoiled very pale from the appearance of the weapons: "you would not—you would not——"

"I would shoot you through the head as I would a dog, if you refuse to behave honourably to my sister!"

"No—it shall not be!" exclaimed a voice, as the door was burst open. "What! you, sir, marry a murderer?"—and it was Cesario who thus spoke in English, which was not merely very tolerable, but perfectly intelligible. "Oh! I repeat, murderer!" he continued, advancing menacingly towards Hector, who sank down pale and agitated upon his seat. "Your sister fired the treacherous shot which stretched Clifford upon the field! And now depart at once—or Mr. Bowman shall know where he may lay his hand upon the shoulder of the young lady who played the part of Mr. Godolphin!"

Hardress looked as if he were annihilated: he gasped for breath—he saw the picture of mingled consternation and horror.

"By heaven, I comprehend it now!" cried Hailes, as a light flashed in unto his brain. "That third shot which struck me as being fired at the time!—and then that surgeon whom I never saw, but whom you tried to persuade me that I did see! Oh, Mr. Hardress! how dread was the crime which on that fatal night was perpetrated!"

The young man pressed his hand to his brow, and staggered back to a seat.

"Hailes, Hailes!" said Hector, accosting him.

and speaking in a hollow voice; "you will not mention this elsewhere?"

"By the living God," cried Andrew, starting up from his chair, "I will make a clean breast of it and divulge everything! Oh, yes!—for if I did not, it would all haunt me as a remorse evermore!"

"Have mercy!—pity me! pity my poor sister!"—and nothing could be more object than the demeanour of Hector Hardress now.

"I dare not promise anything! No, no! I will tell Bowman everything! I swear by all my hopes of salvation"—and he thus borrowed the very words which Hardress had ere now suggested for another purpose,—“I swear by all my hopes of salvation, that I will confess every detail, and Bowman shall know it all in the morning!”

"Well then, if such be your resolve," murmured Hector, in almost a dying tone, "promise me—promise me that you will do naught until the morning?"

"This pledge I willingly give you," answered Hailes. "God knows I do not seek to send your sister and yourself to the scaffold! Take time to escape!—begone!"

The miserable Hardress saw that he had obtained from the young man the utmost concession that it was possible to draw from him; and he hurried from the room in a state of mind that may be better conceived than described.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE LAUDANUM.

WHEN the door closed behind Hector, Andrew Hailes stood for nearly a minute gazing upon the vacancy which the retreating form had just now filled: he seemed as if he were so bewildered and astounded that he could scarcely put faith in the evidence of his own senses. At length, abruptly turning towards the falsely-styled Cesario, he exclaimed, "My dear Lisette, from what have you saved me! How deeply grateful I ought to be to you! Oh, I should have yielded—yes, I should have yielded to his threats and representations!"

"Yes—you would have yielded," interjected the disguised female, with momentary accents of contempt: but the next instant flinging a look of tenderness upon Hailes, she added, "And now you will not think that it has been to no purpose I persisted in accompanying you!"

"I repeat, Lisette," ejaculated Andrew, "that I owe you an immense debt of gratitude! Josephine Hardress a murderess!—Josephine the same whom I took to be some loose female, or at least some woman of lax morals!"

"And doubtless such was she," interjected Lisette; "for I am very much mistaken if Theodore Clifford, whom her hand shot dead upon the field, did not perish on account of the very offence for which her brutal bully of a brother would have just now taken your life, or else have forced you into the stonement of a marriage which could not have been otherwise than hateful to your feelings."

"Yes—truly!" cried Hailes: "Josephine is a wanton and a demirep! How sad that one so eminently beautiful, so accomplished in mind, and so pleasing in manners, should be so frail—so wicked! But how learnt you, Lisette, the terrible secret which you just now revealed so opportunely?"

"At Boulogne I beheld a young lady whom I thought I knew—a second glance convinced me that I had seen her before—and the astounding idea flashed to my brain that this was the same person whom you brought to the house at Notting Hill and introduced as *Mr. Godolphin*. I listened to a conversation which took place betwixt that lady and Mr. Hardress: I discovered who she was—I learnt also the terrible crime of which she had been guilty, and how on the night of that fatal duel her own brother had bade her secure a pistol about her person that she might inflict vengeance on Theodore Clifford, in case his weapon—I mean the weapon of that brother—should fail in its aim!"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Hailes, "what guilt! what wickedness! Oh, yes! Josephine must have been Clifford's victim!—for under no other circumstances would a young and tenderly nurtured lady become nerved to enter upon such a course! But why, Lisette, when you discovered all this at Boulogne, did you not tell me?"

The disguised female blushed and remained silent for nearly a minute—at the expiration of which she said, "I thought if I might possibly be enabled to render you a service—if I determined to watch these proceedings to their fullest extent, and interfere only at the moment when they were coming to a crisis,—in a word, Andrew, if I chose to conduct the business after my own fashion, is there any harm, since the result is to your advantage?"

"No, no, Lisette—dear Lisette! I did not mean that there was any harm!"

"And now you are saved from marriage with a wanton," continued the young Italian woman,—“not merely a wanton, but a murderess!—and I am happy that 'tis I who have been enabled thus to save you! I overheard every syllable that passed between the villain Hector Hardress and yourself from the moment that the dessert was placed upon the table and he suggested that I should be ordered to leave the room and go and amuse myself elsewhere. The illusion you made to your interview this afternoon with Mr. Bowman did not escape me; and thus you may have observed how I adopted your own words, when I threatened Mr. Hardress just now that the lawyer should be placed in a position to lay his hand upon the shoulder of the young lady who played the part of Mr. Godolphin!”

"Lisette, you have rendered me an immense service," said Hailes, "and it shall not be forgotten. No—never!"

We will here explain how it was the young Italian woman was in attendance upon Andrew Hailes, and wearing masculine apparel. We must therefore proceed to observe retrospectively, that when Andrew had given bail, the day after the duel, for his appearance at a future day, he fancied that he was going to enjoy in London the renown of the adventures through which he had

passed. But his uncle, fearing that he would get into fresh mischief, and looking upon London as a place that was proverbially ruinous to young men, insisted upon taking him again upon the Continent. Lisetta, who was much attached to Hailes, besought and implored that some arrangement might be made for her to accompany him. The old uncle was purlind : the girl accordingly cropped the redundancy of her beautiful black hair, apparelled herself in a neat suit of black, put on a white neckcloth, and looked the genteel young valet to perfection. The name of Cesario was substituted for Lisetta ; and thus Andrew's mistress accompanied him abroad, the uncle remaining ignorant of the cheat. This old gentleman did not long survive the departure from England ; and when he had breathed his last and was buried in some Continental town, Lisetta might have at once resumed her female apparel, were it not that two distinct reasons prevented her from doing so. The first was that inasmuch as she was entered in the passport of the Messrs. Hailes as Cesario the valet, she could not all in a moment resume her proper character without procuring a passport on her own account—which she could only do at a frontier town on re-entering the country. The other reason was that Andrew Hailes had sufficient decency about him to be unwilling to have it thought that he only waited until the breath was out of his uncle's body in order to live openly with a mistress. And then, being upon the Continent, he found that he liked it alter all better than England ; and he resolved to remain there until it was time to return to London for the pending trial. On arriving in the metropolis, he would have induced Lisetta to resume the apparel of her sex and return to her lodgings at Nutting Hill ; but she had an excuse ready to persuade him to allow her to remain a day or two longer in her present disguise and position. The truth is, she wished to obtain the opportunity of thoroughly unmasking Hector Hardress, and saving Andrew from being forced into a union with Josephine.

We must now take leave of young Hailes and Lisetta for the present, and return to the villa at Baywater.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening when Cicely returned from her expedition to the chemists' shops ; and hastening up the private staircase, she sped into her boudoir. There she at once produced the three or four bottles containing the poison she had purchased ; and she poured the contents into one phial. While she was thus occupied, she was suddenly startled by hearing a footstep behind her : she turned and beheld Josephine Hardress.

Cicely had accidentally omitted to lock the door of her boudoir ; and an ejaculation of angry impatience at her own folly escaped her lips. There she was, still in the plain dress in which she had gone forth to make her purchases—with the common straw bonnet and the thick veil—another veil and a shawl lying upon the table in a manner which showed that they also had been part and parcel of this singular toilet : and moreover she was emptying the contents of three or four little bottles, labelled "LAUDANUM, POISON," into a larger phial, which had no label at all.

"Ah! is that you, Josephine?" ejaculated Ci-

cely. "How you startled me!"—and she covered up the phials with her kerchief.

"I am sorry that I should have disturbed you, Cicely ; I did not know that I ought to have been under the ceremony of knocking at your boudoir-door. But good heavens! where have you been in this strange dress?"

"Where have I been? Oh, no matter now, Josephine. I will tell you to-morrow—or next day—But don't say a word, there's a dear girl!"

"You frighten me, Cicely!" interjected Miss Hardress. "I caught a glimpse of those little bottles which you have endeavoured to conceal! Pray tell me——"

"Now do not be foolish, Josephine—nor get silly ideas into your head. You know very well that I suffer from toothache——"

"You?" ejaculated Miss Hardress. "Why, you have not a bad tooth in your head!"

"I mean that I do not sleep well at night——"

"Oh, Cicely, what do you mean? This confusion on your part perplexes me!"

"Silly girl!" ejaculated Cicely, with petulance : "do not question me any more! I mean nothing wrong! I am not going to poison myself—nor you—nor Hector. But perhaps," she added somewhat haughtily, "I may be permitted to have my secrets as well as you. I have kept your secrets, Josephine ; and I will thank you to keep mine."

Miss Hardress answered not a word : she was profoundly humiliated—she was inwardly bewildered and frightened ; and in a few moments she left the room.

"How provoking!" ejaculated Cicely to herself ; "just when I thought that I had managed everything so nicely and had done my work so cautiously!"

Being regularly out of temper—angry alike with herself and Josephine—she tossed the bottles into a drawer, turned the key in haste, and then began to put off her homely garb and resume a becoming evening-apparel.

Meanwhile Josephine had descended to the parlour, where she threw herself upon a sofa, clasping her hands in anguish, and mentally ejaculating, "Good heavens! what can Cicely mean? Why at every step in my wretched life do I now encounter fresh horrors or perplexities?—fresh sources of vexation and torment? What can she mean? Shall I tell Hector? No, no! I dare not! And yet—Hush! who comes?"

It was Hector himself, who having just sprung out of a cab, rushed into the house, and made his way straight to the parlour. The instant he opened the door, or rather threw it open with violence, Josephine was startled by the pallor and beggariness of his countenance.

"Good heavens, Hector!" she cried, flying towards him ; "what has happened?"

"All is lost! everything will be discovered! You and I, Josephine, must fly!"

"My God!"—and she tottered towards a seat, upon which she sank down.

"Yes—all is lost! There is not a hope, nor a chance—nor the ghost of a chance!" pursued Hector with concentrated bitterness in his accents. "Young Hailes will not have you!—he has discovered that it was your hand which fired the third pistol that night!—he has accused me as an accomplice in the murder—and to-morrow morn-

ing the very first thing he will confess everything to his attorney, and the police will be upon our track! Wretched girl, it is you who have brought about all this!"—and Hector, laying his hand upon his sister's beautiful white shoulder, shook her violently, and with such force that his fingers left marks upon the sensitive flesh.

"Oh, brother! pardon, pardon!" cried the miserable young woman, sinking upon her knees and extending her joined hands towards him.

"Pardon?" he echoed: "pardon?" he repeated with scornful bitterness; and he actually spurned his wretched sister away from him! "For you I must fly the country, never to return!—licentious wanton that you are! Oh, I could crush—I could stomp upon you!"

"Good God! what is the matter?"—and Cicely now burst into the room.

"Matter indeed!" exclaimed Hardress, beginning to pace to and fro in desperate excitement. "I am frenzied! I am crazed! I am well-nigh driven to suicide!"

"Hector, speak! tell me what has happened!" and Cicely was terribly frightened.

Josephine Hardress availed herself of this juncture to hurry forth from the apartment.

"It is time that you should know everything, Cicely!—for I must ask you to come abroad with me—you hold the purse—I myself have little—the allowance my father makes me is, as you know, poor and niggard!"

"Hector, do not talk upon money matters!" interjected Cicely: "we have never yet quarrelled upon that score! Why should you go abroad? Has anything fresh transpired in reference to the duel? What about Andrew Hailes? why was Josephine at your feet? why were you upbraiding her?"

"Cicely, you must soon know the truth—and you may as well have it from my lips as from those of another. Indeed, better, better! Learn, then, that on the occasion of the fatal duel Theodore Clifford fell not by my hand! A shot was fired in vengeance—it was a righteous vengeance!—but a tribunal of justice would proclaim it treacherous—perfidious—murderous! It was Josephine who fired that shot."

"Ah!"—and a light seemed to break in upon the brain of Cicely, and she now comprehended why Josephine's manner had grown so changed immediately after that duel and before she could possibly have known that she was in a way to become a mother on account of her connexion with Andrew Hailes.

"Yes—it is as I tell you, Cicely! Hailes has discovered it all!—our plan for marrying him to Josephine has exploded—and to-morrow morning everything will be revealed to the police! I must fly! Yes—within the hour that is passing! And Josephine must go with me! I cannot leave her behind, even though I now hate her as the cause of my own utter downfall! But you—what will you do? Remember, Cicely, before you answer me—remember that I never breathed a syllable of reproach on account of the horrible stigma that has fallen upon one with whom you are nearly connected—I mean Mr. Timperley!"

"I know it, Hector—I know it. Your fortunes and mine are bound up together. Through you

I have obtained rank and position;—through me you look for the means of a handsome and comfortable living. Besides—But no matter! To speak of the love which characterised the early period of our acquaintance were now ridiculous!"

"And you will go with me, Cicely?" exclaimed Hector, rejoiced at the willingness of his wife to share his exile. "Remember! you shall be your own mistress in all things!"

"I cannot accompany you, Hector—but I will follow you," interrupted Cicely. "In three or four days—"

"Enough! I cannot ask you to do more. Ah! where is Josephine? Go to her, Cicely!—tell her that time presses—she must get ready to accompany me—we must depart stealthily and at once! A small carpet-bag with a few necessities—and that is all! Go and fetch Josephine!"

Cicely hastened from the parlour, and ascended to her sister-in-law's chamber. But Josephine was not there: Cicely searched for her in three or four other rooms—and still she was not to be found. Then, carrying a taper in her hand, she repaired to her own boudoir; and a scream burst from her lips. Upon the carpet lay Josephine—motionless—dead!

The truth was quickly ascertained. The unhappy young lady had swallowed the contents of the phial of laudanum, for which she had no doubt searched; and a subsequent investigation showed Cicely that in the impetuous haste with which she had flung the bottles into her drawer and then turned the key in the lock, she had not closed that drawer; but the bolt of the lock had missed its hold and had left the drawer easy to be opened.

No one heard that scream from Cicely's lips. All her presence of mind returned. She paused and listened. No sound reached her ear—no footstep was approaching. She comprehended all the gravity of her own position in a moment. A large fire was burning in the grate: she took from the drawer the little bottles bearing the label of "Laudanum"—and she flung them amidst the incandescent coals. She emptied half the contents of the bottle over them; and then rushing from the boudoir, she raised the alarm. Hector was the first upon the spot; but before he could exchange a single syllable with his wife, the domestics were flocking thither. The tale was told by Cicely: Miss Hardress had taken something—she knew not what—it was evidently poison—it was probably laudanum, for there was an odour thereof in the boudoir.

All was horror and confusion. A surgeon was sent for; a message was likewise despatched to Lord and Lady Mendlesham. The medical man arrived first; and he pronounced that life was extinct. Two or three drops remaining in the phial, told him what the poison was; and thus there was no need to pursue the investigation. Lord and Lady Mendlesham came, to find their daughter dead—to weep over her remains—and to listen to whatever tale Cicely might have to tell in reference to the catastrophe; for in the meanwhile Hector had fled from the villa, and was speeding to the Dover railway to take the night-train that he might get out of the country as soon as possible.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE LANCET.

On the following morning Andrew Hailes surrendered himself to take his trial at the Old Bailey. The Hon. Hector Hardress did not make his appearance; and his recognizances were estreated. The indictment, in the usual manner, charged Andrew Hailes with being accessory to the death of the Hon. Theodore Clifford; and to this the young man, by the advice of his legal friends, pleaded Guilty. The counsel who was retained on his behalf, then rose to make a statement to the Court.

The learned gentleman said that the facts that he was about to make public, had emanated from the spontaneous confession of Mr. Hailes himself, who considered that he was only performing his duty to society by making a clean breast of it in respect to the circumstances that had involved him in this position. He (the learned gentleman) was all the more ready to become the medium of publishing those facts, inasmuch as they would tend to prove the unsophisticated character of his client Andrew Hailes, and show how easily that young gentleman—that mere boy—might be led into difficulties by designing persons of more worldly experience. That the other culprit who ought to have been then present—the Hon. Hector Hardress—was such a person, there could be no doubt; and although it was painful to speak ill of the dead, yet it was his (the learned gentleman's) duty to add that the deceased Theodore Clifford was not a young man of a very high state of morality. Painful facts must now be disclosed. There could be little doubt that the deceased Theodore Clifford had seduced Miss Josephine Hardress, the sister of one of the principals in the duel. Hence arose that duel; and Theodore Clifford, having some acquaintance with Andrew Hailes, solicited him to act as his second. The demand was hurriedly put—the response was as hurriedly given; for Hailes had not the moral courage to refuse the favour required by his friend. Mr. Hardress was provided with a second, who in connexion with this lamentable affair was already known to the world as Mr. Godolphin. But there was in reality no Mr. Godolphin at all! The person who had figured in the hostile meeting—who had acted as the second of Hector Hardress—was none other than his sister, Josephine herself! Aye, and what was more—painful though it were for him (the learned gentleman) to make the statement—painful as it would be for those present to hear it—it must nevertheless be proclaimed, to the effect that it was the hand of Miss Hardress which fired the pistol which stretched Theodore Clifford a corpse upon the ground!

These words produced an immense sensation in the Court; and when it had somewhat subsided, the learned counsel continued in the following manner:—

It was not necessary to enter into any further details. It could be no secret—for the morning newspapers recorded the melancholy fact—that the unfortunate young lady whose name had been mentioned, put a period to her existence on the

past evening by means of poison. That she dreaded the inevitable exposure of this day, there could be no doubt; and should her brother, who had fled from the same, be ever captured and brought to that bar of justice, Andrew Hailes would consider it to be his duty to stand forward as a witness against him. He (the learned gentleman) hoped that the undoubted contrition which the youthful prisoner was thus by every possible means displaying, would be taken into merciful consideration by the learned Judge when pronouncing sentence; and he (the counsel) would most emphatically insist upon the propriety of making every possible allowance for the ignorance of the youthful prisoner in all the ways of the world, especially as he had now to come to another point on which it was his painful duty to touch.

There was a brief pause; and the barrister continued in the ensuing terms:—

"It must be mentioned to your lordship, that when this unfortunate affair was brought under the cognizance of the police-magistrate at the time of its occurrence three months ago, a surgeon of the name of Gilmore appeared as a witness to prove that he was in attendance when the duel was fought. This man is not now forthcoming. It is understood that he absconded last night, immediately after the tidings reached him that Miss Hardress had committed suicide and that Hector Hardress had fled. Now, my youthful client has candidly confessed that he never saw the surgeon at all upon the ground; but that Hector Hardress endeavoured to take advantage of his agitated and excited state of mind, and to make him believe that he did really behold a human form at a distance. Thus, your lordship will perceive that in every respect was this youth—this stripling—treated as a dupe in the hands of designing persons. He now comes forward and voluntarily confesses everything. He might have persisted in declaring that he did see the surgeon upon the field: but his policy is to tell the complete truth, even though it may aggravate the peril of his own position. As I at first said, he resolved to make a clean breast of it; and he has done so. If in one instance he violated his duty to society, he now seeks to make every possible amends. He feels that henceforth he shall possess a clear conscience, unburdened by the weight of any criminal secret."

The learned counsel concluded a very eloquent speech by again imploring the judge to take into consideration the facts that had been adduced to show—first of all, the artless inexperience and unsophisticated character of the youthful prisoner—and secondly, the contrite readiness with which he now came forward to reveal every incident connected with that unfortunate affair.

The appeal was not made in vain; and the Judge, after a brief but impressive address to Andrew Hailes, sentenced him to one day's imprisonment in the gaol of Newgate.

The revelations in respect to Hector Hardress and his sister Josephine, produced an immense sensation throughout the fashionable world; and this was sustained when the result of the Coroner's Inquest upon the corpse of the deceased young lady, showed that she was in a way to become a mother when she destroyed herself. But whence had she procured the poison? Clearly, who was

examined as a witness at the Inquest, proclaimed her utter inability to explain how her sister-in-law came in possession of the laudanum. A verdict of "Temporary Insanity" was returned; and the remains were buried with the utmost privacy.

Scarcely had the report of the Coroner's inquest appeared in the newspapers, when it elicited a letter from a chemist in the neighbourhood of Golden Square, stating that on the evening of Josephine's suicide a female of tall stature, with a thick veil over her countenance, called at his shop and purchased a small quantity of laudanum. She was very plainly dressed; but the chemist had noticed that when she removed her glove to take the money from her purse to pay for the drug, she displayed a beautiful white hand evidently belonging to a lady. This letter brought two or three more from other chemists—until the fact was evidently proven that some person answering pretty well the same description, had bought small quantities of laudanum at different shops on that particular night. The servants at the Villa could not say that Josephine had *not* been out for an hour or two on the evening thus referred to; while they were equally unable to state that their mistress Cicely had been out secretly on the occasion. It was therefore believed that the mystery was solved in respect to the mode by which the deceased young lady had obtained the poison.

But if it were a matter of self-congratulation for Cicely on the one hand, that she remained altogether unsuspected in reference to the purchase of the laudanum, the facts which had transpired were, on the other hand, a source of annoyance and perplexity. For how, under existing circumstances, was she to procure the poison which she had promised to convey to her uncle, Mr. Timperley? She dared not disguise herself anew and go and make fresh purchases: she would not even risk the undertaking in any distant obscure provincial town. Yet on the other hand she was anxious to serve her uncle unto the very last: for she knew that thereon depended her heritage of some fifty or sixty thousand pounds, which would be otherwise assuredly left away from her. She was too much a woman of the world not to appreciate the value of money, and naturally too adventurous in her disposition not to look well after it when there was a chance of its being procured.

Some days had elapsed since the suicide of Josephine and the Inquest, and since the frightful revelations which were made to the world through the medium of Andrew Hailes's Counsel. Cicely had kept close to her house,—only going out to attend the inquest, and to call upon her mother-in-law, Lady Mendlesham, who was stretched upon a bed of illness, the result of the terrible shock which she had sustained from recent events. Cicely was thinking how she should proceed in reference to her uncle—whether she should go and visit him again, and see what he could suggest—or whether she should wait yet a few days longer in the hope that her own ingenuity might prompt her effectively,—when she was surprised by a visit from Mrs. Timperley.

"Ah, my dear aunt!" exclaimed Cicely, putting on a most melancholy expression of countenance;

"what terrible things have happened since I saw you the other day! We have all our troubles in this life! You must not think it was unkind on my part in not coming to see you again; but I have really been so ill and low-spirited—and then too, I am almost ashamed to show my face in public, lest people should point at me as the sister of the young lady who killed herself, and the wife of the gentleman who ran away instead of surrendering to his bail——"

"My dear Cicely," interrupted the aunt, who was crying and sobbing, "I did not expect you to call on me yet awhile—I could not expect it under existing circumstances! On the contrary, I felt that I ought to come and see you: but I myself have been so ill and wretched——"

"Poor aunt! And now tell me, when did you see——"

"I was there yesterday," interjected Mrs. Timperley, anticipating the remainder of the question. "Your poor uncle bears up wonderfully: but then he is sustained by conscious innocence. Ah, Cicely! how miserable your husband must feel, knowing that he instigated his wretched sister to kill Mr. Clifford!"

"We will not talk of that, aunt!" said Mrs. Hardress. "Let Hector be what he may, nothing can prevent him from some day becoming Lord Mendlesham—and I shall at the same time take my rank as a peeress. Indeed, my dear aunt, although this world presents many painful phases to the view, it also shows some agreeable ones——"

"No doubt of it, my dear," responded the aunt, who amidst all her troubles, experienced sufficient vanity to be proud of possessing a niece who already bore the prefix of *Honourable* to her name, and who in due course must become a peeress. "But to return to your poor uncle—he asked very kindly after you yesterday—he spoke a great deal about the recent unfortunate occurrences—he made me enter into all details——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Cicely; "and what did he say?"—for it struck her at the instant that it was quite possible he might have conveyed to her some hint or suggestion, through the medium of a message that might bear a double interpretation, but the true meaning of which might not be discerned by the bearer thereof—for Mrs. Timperley was not remarkable for any great degree of penetration.

"Your uncle said what a pity it was that so much diagrae should have been brought down upon the Mendlesham family, and that he wished he could see his lordship to offer his condolences—though of course the condolences of a man in prison do seem rather inconsistent."

"Nevertheless," observed Cicely, "you see that my uncle would like to meet Lord Mendlesham?"—and then she thought to herself, "This is a significant reminder for me!"

"Your uncle asked me a great deal about the death of Josephine," continued Mrs. Timperley; "for I need not tell you that he is not allowed to see the newspapers. He wondered how it was possible Josephine could have procured the laudanum—or how it could have been in your house——"

"Why, you might have told him, my dear aunt——"



"Softly, softly! I did tell him exactly what I dare say you are going to remind me of—the letters which those chemists wrote to the newspapers, stating how a tall lady, who, though disguised, was evidently of distinguished position, called at their shops and bought small quantities of the poison——"

"To be sure!" interjected Cicely; "there could be no doubt that it was poor Josephine!" But what comment did my uncle make? I am glad he does not think that it was through any carelessness on my part Josephine could have got hold of the poison."

"I do not know if he made any particular comment," said Mrs. Timperley, in a musing manner,—"unless it were that he said something about the *Lancet*——"

"The *Lancet*?" echoed Cicely.

"Yes—the medical publication," responded Mrs. Timperley.

No. 103.—AGNES.

"Ah, I understand!" said the niece, to whom the mention of the journal came like a ray of inspiration. "My uncle doubtless thought that the *Lancet* would make some severe strictures upon the disclosures of the inquest, or the indiscriminate sale of poisons to unknown persons applying for them under suspicious circumstances."

"I forget exactly what it was that your uncle said, Cicely—I was too much distressed at the time to take very particular notice: but one thing I recollect——"

"What is that, dear aunt?"

"That your uncle told me to be sure and bid you bear the *Lancet* in mind; for that it is possible your own conduct in the matter might be misunderstood, and severe strictures passed upon yourself. He of course wants you to stand well with the public——"

"I am truly grateful that he should think of me," exclaimed Cicely, "at a moment when he is

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in such deep trouble and affliction on his own account. Tell him I will come and see him in a few days. Be sure you tell him this, dear aunt!"

Mrs. Timperley took her leave: and when she was gone, Cicely hastened to her writing-desk, and thence took a penknife which she had purchased on the Continent.

"This, properly sharpened," she said to herself, "will serve the purpose as well as a lancet. It were unsafe for me to go and purchase a lancet, which might afterwards be identified by the shop-keeper selling it! Besides, the old man knew very well that if he conveyed the hint I should find the means of carrying it out. His suggestion was sufficient! and now to work!"

Cicely repaired to her fugitive husband's dressing room; and there she found a bone, on which she set to work to render the blade of the penknife as sharp as possible. She thus effaced the name of the Florentine maker; and she imparted to that blade a keenness of edge that would have enabled it in this respect to vie with a razor. When this portion of her task was accomplished, Cicely procured a little sand, such as was used for the cages of her canary-birds; and filling a small lucifer-match box therewith, she embedded the penknife in the midst of it. Finally she enveloped the box in a piece of paper, and tied it round with a bit of pack-thread.

"It will not do to seal it, or seem too careful to prevent the packet from being opened, lest his lordship's suspicions should be thereby excited. As it now is, he will take it for granted that what I tell him is the truth, inasmuch as he will naturally think that there can be no deception, for the very simple reason that he might cut the thread, open the box, and satisfy himself."

Having thus made alike her preparations and calculations, Cicely proceeded to her noble father-in-law's house. She obtained an immediate interview with him; and her first inquiry was concerning her ladyship. The answer was unfavourable.

"Lady Mendlesham," said the nobleman, "is evidently in a very precarious estate. And no wonder! Good God, that such misfortunes should have fallen upon us! Ah, Cicely, when you married Hector, you came into a family which seems to be accursed! Have you heard from your husband?"

"Yes—he is at Brussels," was the reply.

"Unhappy young man!" ejaculated Mendlesham; "what in heaven's name is to become of him? I know not! He must remain abroad for the rest of his life—or at least for many years——"

"Well, my lord," interjected Cicely, "and this is no very particular hardship; for the Continent has its attractions—and so far as I am concerned, I should not care if I never set foot in England again. I am going to rejoin Hector in a few days."

"By the bye, Cicely," said the nobleman, "have you seen that wretched man—your uncle?"

"I was about to speak of him to your lordship," was the response.

"To me?" ejaculated Mendlesham, with a start. "Why, you know I can do nothing for him! You might as well ask me to appeal to the judges to let my son Hector return without trial and with fullest impunity."

"My uncle is not so foolish," resumed Cicely, "as to suppose that your lordship can do him any good. But I believe he has at times acted as your professional adviser occasionally—I know not for what business—my uncle has always been a close man, and never gossiped about the concerns of his clients——"

"Well, well!" exclaimed Mendlesham impatiently: "and what does he want with me?"

"He wishes to see you, my lord, if only for a few minutes: he begged me to request that you would not fail to call upon him. I ought to have delivered this message a week ago; but it was at the moment when those terrible calamities overtook us, and we had enough of our own immediate concerns to think of. And now that the first explosion of anguish has obtained its vent——"

"Enough, Cicely," interrupted Mendlesham: "I will go and see your uncle. Yes—he has at various times done little legal matters for me; and there may now be one or two subjects on which he wishes to discourse with me. I can go quite privately——"

"And if you whisper your name to the governor, my lord," said Cicely, "you will be enabled to see my unfortunate uncle in his own cell."

Mendlesham looked at his watch, and said, "It is now half-past two o'clock. I suppose that I could see him this afternoon?"

"No doubt of it," answered Cicely.

"I will start off at once," observed the nobleman.

"Ah, by the bye, when I think of it," cried Cicely, as if suddenly recollecting something, "your lordship can render me a service. It is a very trifling one—it is simply to deliver this little packet to my unfortunate uncle. It contains snuff. The prison-regulations are very stringent indeed—they will on no account permit tobacco in any shape to enter the walls——"

"Well," interrupted Mendlesham haughtily, "and do you therefore propose, Mrs. Hardress, to convert me—a peer of the realm—into a smuggler of tobacco within the precincts of a gaol?"

"Oh," ejaculated Cicely, with a smile, "if your lordship treats it in that light, there is an end of the matter. I will go myself and take the packet to my uncle: but as he scarcely expects me to-day, I shall be obliged to explain to him how your lordship refused to render him so trifling a service."

"No, no—that is not necessary!" said Mendlesham, who did not wish to make an enemy of Timperley, he being the custodian of the secret in respect to Charles De Vere's birth, and of the income which for such a long series of years had been allowed by his lordship to Mrs. De Vere. "Give me the packet, Cicely—I will deliver it for you. And—and you need not tell your uncle that I at first refused or hesitated."

"Certainly not. But pray be careful, my lord, and do not suffer any of the turnkeys or gaol-authorities to see you slip the packet into the hand of that unfortunate man whom you are going to visit."

Cicely then took her leave of her father-in-law, and returned to her own abode. Her mind was now a prey to the acutest suspense relative to the time when her uncle might execute his suicidal

purpose. Would the deed be perpetrated that day? would he do it in the evening, or during the night? or would he wait two or three days, now that he had once got the means of self-destruction in his possession? No—he would not delay the catastrophe, thought Cicely to herself: he would be too much afraid of having the weapon found about his person and taken from him. Within a few hours, then, her uncle would cease to exist. Of this she was assured. But would he fulfil his promise to her? had he really made such a disposal of his property as he had represented? She had not been to Mr. Campbell's office—she had not gone to put the question, though her uncle had referred her thither: for she felt that such a course would seem sinister and suspicious if viewed in connexion with the subsequent suicide of the prisoner himself. She therefore left the entire matter to chance, though feeling convinced in her own mind that the odds were as ninety-nine to one in her favour.

The hours passed slowly away—the ensuing night was sleepless—and in the morning she waited with feverish suspense for the newspaper. There was no paragraph containing the expected suicide. Perhaps it occurred, or was discovered, too late to find its way into the morning journal? Every instant she expected a note or message from her aunt, telling her of the catastrophe. But the forenoon wore away—and Cicely became convinced that the deed had not as yet been done. She went to Lord Mendlesham's: her lordship was much worse—his lordship was with her—Cicely remained in the sick chamber awhile, without obtaining an opportunity of exchanging a syllable with the nobleman aside. She did not therefore even know whether he had seen her uncle on the preceding day, or whether the little packet had been delivered.

Another long tedious evening—a wakeful night, full of suspense—and then a morning fraught with feverish anxiety until the newspaper came. How Cicely's heart palpitated! Ah, what does she behold! Yes—'twas done! "SUICIDE OF MR. TIMPERLEY IN NEWGATE." Her uncle was no more.

It appeared that on the previous day Mr. Timperley was visited by Mr. Campbell, a lawyer of Lincoln's Inn Fields; and he had an interview of nearly an hour with that gentleman. In the evening the prisoner retired to bed at about nine o'clock. Shortly after eleven a turnkey looked into the cell, according to custom, to see that all was right, when he was shocked on beholding the bed-clothes stained with blood. The truth was soon ascertained: the wretched prisoner had divided the jugular vein with a penknife sharpened to a razor-like keenness. How the weapon had been conveyed to him, remained a perfect mystery; "for the prisoner was not visited by persons who were at all likely to comply with any request that might lead to a suspicion that suicide was meditated." So said the newspaper.

Cicely hastened to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where she found her aunt overwhelmed with affliction; for the tidings of her husband's death had only reached her that same morning:—they had been broken to her by the gaol-chaplain, who called for that purpose. Cicely pretended to feel almost as deeply as her kinswoman: but she suffered her-

self to be more readily consoled by the female servants of the household, especially when in the course of the forenoon Mr. Campbell's name was announced. Mrs. Timperley was too ill to see him; and she begged her niece to go and learn what he wanted,—a request which Cicely was not unwilling to obey. She accordingly repaired to the drawing-room, to which Mr. Campbell had been shown; and still maintaining a most woful expression of countenance, the dissembling lady said, "Oh, Mr. Campbell! what a shocking occurrence is this! what a blow for my poor aunt!"

"It is indeed a tragic event," observed Mr. Campbell. "Little could I have anticipated it when I was with your uncle yesterday. He conversed with me as calmly and collectedly as ever he had done in his life. I asked him three or four times whether he was fully determined to dispose of his property in the manner he had been specifying—and he answered emphatically in the affirmative. He was as sane, Mrs. Hardress,—as sane as you and I are at this moment; and with grief I make this statement, because that he should have committed suicide in such a state of mind argues, alas! that he was guilty of the dread crime imputed to him, and he knew that if he lived to meet his trial it could only be with one terrible result!"

"Have you any message to transmit to my aunt?" asked Cicely, scarcely able to restrain her impatience. "She is too ill to see you—Perhaps you may have something to say in reference to the disposal of my poor uncle's property—something that you think my aunt ought to know as soon as possible—"

"There is nothing very pressing in the business," rejoined Mr. Campbell: "nevertheless people are generally anxious to learn in what pecuniary condition they are left by their departed relatives. You, Mrs. Hardress, are exempt from any such curiosity in the present instance, inasmuch as I believe you are fully aware—"

"Yes—my uncle told me that he had given you certain instructions a week or ten days ago—"

"Ah, true! But those of yesterday, you know—"

"Those of yesterday?" echoed Cicely. "What I was my dear uncle more liberal than even he had promised?"

Campbell looked with a surprised and bewildered air at the lady; and then he said, "Mrs. Hardress, you can scarcely fail to comprehend me—unless indeed I must have misunderstood your late uncle in a certain sense—"

"What do you mean?" demanded Cicely. "How could you have misunderstood him?"

"I was naturally so astonished at the altered instructions which he yesterday gave me," responded the lawyer, "that I inquired the reason of the change; and he said that you had in the most disinterested manner begged and entreated that he would not think of you—"

Cicely sank upon a chair, gasping for breath.

"Because," continued Mr. Campbell, not exactly understanding what feelings influenced Mrs. Hardress now, whether grief or disappointment,—"because," he continued, "you magnanimously represented to him that he had amply provided for you when he gave you a dowry of

thirty thousand pounds, and that therefore you would not stand in the way of any charitable intentions which at any time he might have harboured."

"Did he tell you all this?" asked Cicely, in a hoarse voice.

"No doubt of it, Mrs. Hardress! I am incapable of exaggerating a single syllable in the presence of such solemn—such awful circumstances as these."

"And his property?" said Cicely, exerting all her moral power to command her feelings of suspense and terror. "What—what—has he done? how—It is for my poor dear aunt that I am interested—"

"Oh, Mrs. Timperley is well cared for," replied Campbell. "Twenty thousand pounds are to be laid out in purchasing her an annuity, which at her time of life will be a very handsome one. Then, as for you, Mrs. Hardress—"

"Ah!" and Cicely's heart leapt with reviving hope.

"Twenty guineas to purchase some little memorial of your uncle. For all this was done, you must understand, as I thought, in anticipation of an adverse verdict at the time of trial, and not with the intention of almost immediate suicide. And as to the remainder of your deceased uncle's fortune—which remainder consists of about thirty-five thousand pounds—it is to be divided between twelve hospitals and charitable institutions—"

"Oh, I must go and tell my aunt this!" exclaimed Cicely; and she burst from the room, leaving Mr. Campbell in a state of bewildering wonderment whether it were in disgust or joy that she had thus run off to communicate to Mrs. Timperley how her deceased husband had disposed of the bulk of his property.

But Cicely did not go near her aunt: she tossed on her bonnet and shawl, and darted forth from the house. Flinging herself into her carriage, she ordered it to drive home. There she locked herself in her boudoir, and for several hours gave vent to her rage and disappointment, by means of passionate exclamations, restless paces to and fro, vehement stampings of her feet upon the floor, and thumpings of her clenched fists upon the table. Her uncle had in his death avenged himself for the deception which she had practised upon him when she obtained her dowry! He had made use of her as the means of procuring the instrument of self-destruction, and at the same time cheated her with delusive promises, which were to be followed by the still more flagrant mockery of pretending that she had been so disinterested as to beg him to leave his property to hospitals instead of to herself! Aye—and that paltry sum of twenty guineas, "that she might purchase something in memory of her uncle,"—this was a mockery likewise!

Some hours passed; and then there was a knock at the door of the boudoir. Cicely composed her looks as well as she was able; she had not been crying—her's was a rage too great for weeping—and thus there were no tears to wipe away. As for her secluding herself in her boudoir, it seemed by no means unnatural to her domestics after the fearful suicide of her uncle.

"Lord Mendlesham has called, if you please, ma'am," said the female-servant who had knocked at the door.

Cicely immediately repaired to the drawing-room, where she found her father-in-law; and as she fancied it was just possible he might put a particular question to her, she acted as if nothing were more remote from her thoughts than such an idea; and she hastened to exclaim, "I hope no evil tidings of her ladyship?"

"Her ladyship is bad enough, Cicely," responded Mendlesham: "but this is not the business that brought me hither. A frightful occurrence has taken place—"

"Alas, I know it—I know it! the wretched man!"

"Look at me, Cicely—look at me," said the nobleman; "and tell me that I was not made the means of conveying to your miserable uncle the instrument of self-destruction!"

This was the question which Cicely had in truth anticipated: but she instantaneously looked so amazed—so astounded, that Mendlesham was at once satisfied; and even before his daughter-in-law had time to answer a word, he caught her by the hand, saying, "Pardon me, Cicely! I see that I have wronged you. I am convinced. Let us drop the subject.—Permit me to ask whether you benefit by your uncle's death?"

"No," replied Mrs. Hardress; "and this circumstance may serve to corroborate the assurance that I at least had no complicity with my uncle's suicide."

Lord Mendlesham departed; and that very same evening Cicely set off to Dover, with the intention of immediately rejoining her husband in Brussels. On the following day Lady Mendlesham, after appearing to rally for a few hours, sank rapidly and expired in her husband's arms.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE EBONY BOX.

MAGNIFICENT suites of apartments, at the principal hotel in Florence, were prepared for the reception of Lord Ormeby and his daughter, the Hon. Miss Evelyn—as well as the Count of Camerino and his mother, Mrs. De Vere. They had a considerable retinue of attendants; for now that Lord Ormeby had openly assumed his patrician title, he deemed it proper that he should maintain an appearance consistent with his rank and wealth; while, on the other hand, our hero was necessarily compelled to follow the usages of that Italian State which had become as it were the country of his adoption. There were valets for the two noblemen—lady's-maids for Mrs. De Vere and Agnes—footmen, lacqueys, pages, and all the other menials who necessarily accompanied the half-dozen equipages which conveyed the patrician party and their suite.

Their arrival in Florence created no ordinary sensation; for the young Count of Camerino was regarded as the hero of a perfect romance, while rumour had proclaimed that the young lady whom he was about to lead to the altar was one of the most beautiful creatures on whom the eyes had ever rested. Within an hour after he had alighted at the hotel, Charles sent an intimation to the Minister of the Interior to announce his presence in

the Tuscan capital, and to request an audience of the Grand Duke. In the course of the same day the Minister's principal secretary waited upon our young hero, with the information that the Minister would present him to the Grand Duke at a levee which was to be held on the morrow. Accordingly, at the appointed hour, the young Count proceeded to the palace: but he went not thither alone—he was accompanied by his mother, Lord Ormsby, and Agnes; for on the Continent the reception days of Sovereigns are generally open for ladies as well as for gentlemen, and thus combine the two ceremonies which in England are kept distinct under the respective names of Levee and Drawing-room.

The state-apartments were magnificently furnished; and numbers of persons of both sexes were already gathered in those rooms which led towards the principal one. The splendid uniforms of the officers of the Tuscan army—the court dresses of the various diplomatic functionaries—the stars and decorations glittering upon the breasts of personages of rank wearing plain dresses—and the elegant costumes of the ladies, constituted a spectacle of the gayest and most brilliant description. On the entrance of the little party in whom our readers are so especially interested, they were accosted by the British Ambassador at the Court of Florence; and rumour quickly whispered their names throughout the suite of waiting-rooms. Thus they soon found themselves the object of universal interest; but a refined courtesy prevented the feeling from manifesting itself in a way at all obtrusive or offensive towards the gentle and delicate-minded Agnes.

While the little party was still conversing with the British Ambassador, the French diplomatic functionary joined the group; and after proffering his congratulations to our hero on his marvellous change of fortune, he said, "Permit me to inquire concerning my fellow-countryman and your friend, M. Marcellin?"

"He is in perfect health," answered Charles, "and has every reason to be happy. Indeed, I have no doubt that in the course of a day or two he will give your Excellency a similar assurance from his own lips."

"Ah! then your lordship expects him in Florence?" said the French envoy.

"Yes—with his young bride."

"Oh! ho!" ejaculated the diplomatist: "then the gay and handsome Edgar Marcellin has married at last?"

"And will no doubt become as steady in his matrimonial state," interjected Charles, "as he was gay in his period of bachelor freedom."

"And whom may he have espoused?" asked the French Ambassador.

"A young, beautiful, and loving creature," replied Charles; "for though I myself have not seen her, yet I am enabled to speak eulogistically on her behalf, inasmuch as she is an intimate friend of Miss Evelyn's. Your Excellency may have perhaps forgotten that when you were so kindly assisting us in unravelling the horrible mysteries connected with the Marchioness di Mirano, three months ago, Edgar Marcellin mentioned the name of Corinne, the sister of the murdered page Giulio——"

"I recollect perfectly!" exclaimed the Ambassador. "Ah! now I comprehend! It is Corinna

Paoli who has become the bride of my rich, handsome, chivalrous-minded young fellow-countryman?"

Charles replied in the affirmative, — adding, "Edgar and his bride set out from Paris exactly a week ago to visit Florence. They are travelling by easy stages; and they may be expected here within a day or two."

"I understand," said the French Ambassador, in a low tone, and with a smile of good-natured elyness; "those who have been recently married, are now to come and witness the happiness of those who are on the point of being married."

Charles smiled; and the French diplomatist added, "It will afford me the greatest pleasure to shake hands again with M. Marcellin."

He then glided away to another part of the room; and the young Count of Camerino now beheld Sir Alexander and Lady Holcroft advancing towards him. The Baronet looked perfectly happy; Carlotta was leaning upon his arm with all that fond confidence and reliance which showed that she received from him that kind and affectionate treatment which made her cling to him with all the devotedness of her loving heart; so that Charles perceived at a glance that the match was entirely a propitious one. Carlotta was elegantly dressed, and looked exceedingly well. A blush for a moment crossed her countenance as she met our hero's eye; for she knew that he was aware how she had eloped with Sir Alexander and lived with him for a short time ere becoming his wife. The Count of Camerino instantaneously relieved Carlotta from this embarrassment, by hastening to take her by the hand and present her to his mother and to Agnes, as well as to Lord Ormsby.

"My dear friend," said Holcroft, again and again pressing our hero's hand, "how heartily do I proffer my congratulations on account of the hair-breadth escapes you have sustained and the marvellous changes of fortune you have experienced! Who would have thought," he added, drawing Charles a little aside, "that when I first knew you as one of the junior *attachés* to the Embassy at Naples, I should some day have to felicitate you on becoming a wealthy nobleman? My dear Count of Camerino—for it affords me pleasure to address you by that title—may I hope that the friendship which commenced between us at Naples, is now to be renewed and henceforth to endure until the end?"

Our hero's affirmative answer was given with effusion; and the two friends again pressed each other's hands warmly. In the meantime Carlotta had been conversing with Mrs. De Vere and Agnes, who were at once prepared to like her, because they saw that she was thoroughly unaffected, ingenuous, and of the most artless goodnature. Such was also the impression she made upon Lord Ormsby.

The reception was by this time commencing in the State-saloon; but inasmuch as we have no inclination to dwell upon this ceremony, we shall pass it over in a few words,—contenting ourselves with informing the reader that the young Count of Camerino was cordially welcomed by the Grand Duke, who, as well as the members of his family, surveyed our hero with a visible and even marked interest. The same sentiment was manifested on the presentation of Lord Ormsby, Agnes, and Mrs.

De Vere, who were introduced by the British Ambassador,—our hero having been presented by the Tuscan Minister of the Interior.

On the following day, at about noon, Agnes was in her own chamber at the hotel, engaged with her two lady's-maids and a Florentine milliner, in superintending the preparation of the bridal raiment,—when another of her handmaids entered the room, and presenting a card, said, "The lady wishes to see you, Miss, immediately if convenient."

Agnes glanced at the name upon the card, and at once replied, "Oh, yes! I will see her ladyship without delay! Let her be shown into my sitting-room."

Agnes then hastened to change her morning-dress for a costume that was more appropriate for the reception of her patrician visitress; and she then proceeded to the sitting-room belonging to her own special suite.

The two ladies who now met, beheld each other for the first time; but they had nevertheless heard much of each other, and all that they had thus heard was so pleasing and so favourable that they were already prepared to become friends and to love each other. Thus it was not a mere exchange of formal salutations when they met; but they at once took each other's hands—and then, with a quick and sudden simultaneousness, they opened their arms and locked each other in a fervid embrace.

When this effusion of the heart's most generous yearnings and inspirations had found its vent, the two young ladies sat down together. Then they looked upon each other in silence. Agnes beheld before her a woman of remarkable beauty—about three-and-twenty years of age, and with an expression of such ineffable sweetness and true genuine modesty in her looks that it was impossible to be otherwise than irresistibly attracted towards her. On the other hand, this lady was gazing upon a young creature of nineteen, whose loveliness was of a truly angelic description, the tresses of whose auburn hair were floating in a golden redundancy upon shoulders stainlessly fair, and in the depths of whose large blue eyes might be read the purest and chastest thoughts. The survey which thus mutually took place was reciprocally favourable; and it was Agnes who first broke the silence by saying, "You know not what pleasure this visit affords me! I have now an opportunity of expressing my thanks to one who has conferred a thousand obligations on *him* in whom, as you well know, I am so deeply interested!"

"And believe me, dear Agnes," was the reply given with an equal fervour, "it is with the most unfeigned pleasure I now form your acquaintance—I greet you as a friend—I clasp you by the hand—and I perceive at a glance that you are in every way fitted to become the bride of him whom I am proud to regard as my friend!"

"You call me by my Christian name of Agnes," said our heroine, taking the lady's hand; "and I am rejoiced that you thus at once prove that you look upon me as if I were your sister! Believe therefore, dear Lucia, it is a sisterly love that I shall ever experience towards you!"

"Yes—we will love each other, and we will think of each other as sisters!" rejoined the

Countess de Milazzo—for she the visitress was. "Embrace me again, dear Agnes!—embrace me, and repeat the assurance that henceforth we are to love each other as sisters!"

Our young heroine threw herself into the arms of the Countess, murmuring with much emotion, "We are sisters!"

"It was not my intention to make myself personally known to you," resumed the Countess de Milazzo, after a long pause, "until you should have become the happy bride of him who loves you so devotedly and who is the noblest-minded young man that ever existed on the face of the earth! But within the last two months—since those terrible events at Sienna, and since I beheld my sister enter a cloister—I have reflected seriously and deeply—and I have come to a particular determination."

Agnes gazed upon her new friend with the most earnest interest; for the Countess was speaking with a tone and look of melancholy resignation.

"I cannot explain myself further now, dear Agnes," proceeded Lucia; "but you shall shortly know—in a few weeks—what is the meaning of the words that may now appear mysterious unto you. You have promised to love me as a sister; and by this love I conjure you not to question me at present. I have another boon to ask—and it is also in the name of our sisterly love that I adjure you to grant it."

"Oh, what could you ask of me that I would not grant?" cried Agnes with emotion.

"Believe me, thou pure and beautiful creature! thou earthly incarnation of the angel-nature of those who dwell in heaven!—believe me," cried the Countess, with fervour, "I am incapable of asking you anything that you may not accord! From all that I have previously heard of you, I was prepared to love you devotedly: but now that I have seen you, dear Agnes, I feel that it is one of the most blessed privileges to receive the assurance of a sisterly love from such lips as your's! Oh, I would lay down my life to insure your happiness! And now the boon that I ask is that you will permit me to offer you a testimonial of this earnest friendship and sincere love that I entertain for you. Say, Agnes—will you grant me the boon? will you accept the proof of those feelings with which you have inspired me?"

"How could I refuse you? or why should I refuse you?" murmured our young heroine, her heart swelling with emotions, and tear-drops glistening like twin-diamonds in her eyes. "Oh, I shall rejoice to accept a testimony of your friendship and of your sisterly love!"

"You have made me happy, Agnes!" exclaimed Lucia, a smile of joy—almost of triumph passing over her beautiful countenance; and then pointing to a box of some dark wood which stood upon the table, but which had hitherto remained concealed by her white kerchief as if it had been negligently slung there, she said, "This, dear Agnes, is my little offering. You can look at it when I am gone—for I am now about to bid you farewell."

"To bid me farewell?" exclaimed our heroine. "You are not about to depart?"

"I arrived in Florence only an hour ago," answered Lucia, "and the horses which are to bear me hence are by this time already harnessed to my carriage."

"But you will see Charles?"

"No, dear Agnes—not now. Indeed I first of all ascertained that I might be sure of finding you alone here before I came to pay you this present visit. Farewell, my dear friend! In a few weeks you shall hear from me; and then—and then shall I expect to see you with him who will then be your husband, at the retreat wherein I am about to seclude myself."

These last words were spoken with a tremulousness which displayed deep inward emotion; and the Countess, folding Agnes to her bosom, murmured in accents that were still more broken, "Farewell, sweet friend! farewell for the present! May all possible earthly happiness attend upon you; and rest assured that you will ever possess the sisterly love of her who now makes this invocation!"

The Countess di Milezzo then quickly disengaged herself from our heroine's arms; and with some degree of abruptness she quitted the room. Agnes sat down upon the sofa, reflecting on all that had taken place,—fancying that she could obtain a glimmering of what Lucia's present intention was, but still being very far from entertaining any certainty on the subject. She had for the moment forgotten the box which had been left upon the table, so absorbed was she in the contemplation of the point to which we have just alluded. But presently she recollected the memorial of friendship which Lucia had left behind her; and she glanced towards it. It was a handsome box, made of ebony or some dark wood; and it was inlaid with mother-of-pearl. It was scarcely so large as an ordinary work-box: it was as long and wide perhaps, but not nearly so deep. The key to fit the lock was attached to a ribbon that was tied around it. As Agnes contemplated the box, a strange recollection gradually came back to her mind. The idea became more vivid; and it suddenly made her start—and then a serious, even solemn expression settled upon her countenance. What was it that thus came back to the mind of the beautiful girl?—what reminiscence of the past was it that thus affected her? It was the dream of Floribel!

Yea: nearly eighteen months had elapsed since Floribel—then still an inmate of Sydney Villa—had depicted the dream to Agnes. And what was it that Floribel had beheld in the dream which was thus brought back to our heroine's memory? "I fancied," she said at the time, "that you were standing at the toilet-table, preparing to open a beautiful box, elaborately carved, and inlaid with mother-of-pearl: it seemed to be of ebony, and was about the size of a work-box."

It was thus that Floribel had spoken at the time; and Agnes was now struck by the recollection—although there were several discrepancies between the details of Floribel's vision and the present circumstances. For Agnes was not now standing at the toilet-table, to open the box—nor was it very elaborately carved—nor was it of the precise size of a work-box.

"And after all," ejaculated Agnes to herself, at the expiration of a few minutes' reflection, "it is a mere coincidence!—for what is there strange in a friend's presenting me with a casket that may contain a gift suitable to the rank and circumstances of her who gives and her who receives?"

And yet Agnes hesitated to open the box; for despite the train of reasoning through which her mind had just been led—despite her lofty intelligence and her excellent good sense—there was a certain superstitious feeling connected with this box in its association with a portion of Floribel's dream. The truth was that Agnes dreaded lest that portion of the dream should be actually realized, and that on opening the box she should find it to contain a simple chaplet of flowers. For in this case Agnes would be compelled to shudder at the idea that the other portion of Floribel's dream would likewise receive its fulfilment,—the portion which regarded her own lost degraded self,—and that the hideous skeleton grinning up at her from the interior of a coffin, might be regarded as significant of a miserable fate being in store for that wayward Floribel!

"At all events," ejaculated Agnes, seeking to turn her ideas into another and less dismal channel, "I ought only to open the box in the presence of my dear father, of Charles, and his mother!"—and she forthwith sent to ascertain if those personages were in the drawing-room belonging to the suite of apartments which they occupied at the hotel; for she knew that her father and Charles had temporarily gone out ere now, to arrange some details in connexion with the approaching nuptials.

Our heroine's handmaidens returned with the intimation that Lord Ormsby, the Count of Canorino, and Mrs. De Vere were all three in the drawing-room; so that thither Agnes at once proceeded, carrying the box in her hands. She hastened to relate everything which had occurred between herself and the Countess di Milezzo; and her recital was listened to with the utmost interest. At its termination Lord Ormsby said, "My dear girl, you may assuredly accept that testimonial of friendship and sisterly love, of whatsoever nature it may be."

"No doubt!" ejaculated Charles: and he also, as well as Agnes, fancied that he could form a glimmering idea of the nature of the seclusion into which the Countess was on the point of retiring.

"Perhaps," thought Mrs. De Vere to herself, "this casket contains a splendid set of diamonds or some such appropriate gift for one who is about to become a bride?"

The key was turned in the lock: but when the lid was raised, no diamonds sent forth their starry jets—no gems flashed forth their light. A simple wreath of pearls, exquisitely fashioned into the semblance of a chaplet of camellias, first met the eye. Agnes started for a moment and turned pale, because her first impression was that all this portion of Floribel's dream was now realised: but a second thought almost instantaneously reminded her that it was a simple wreath of flowers which was produced from the box of Floribel's dream; whereas it was a chaplet of pearls that issued from the real box that now stood upon the table.

"It is very elegant—very appropriate!" said Charles, taking up the chaplet; "so pure—so chaste!"

"Yes—it is very beautiful," said Mrs. De Vere: and yet she could not help thinking that it was scarcely a gift rich and substantial enough for one of the Countess di Milezzo's high station and great wealth.

"What have we here?" said Lord Ormsby, drawing forth some papers that were at the bottom of the box, and which were tied round with a piece of red tape. "It is legal or official writing; and Ah! stamps! Why, these are the impressions used in Piedmont! Look, Charles! you are a better Italian scholar than I. What mean these documents?"

Our hero opened the papers; and as he ran his eye hastily over them, the animation of an unmistakable pleasure overspread his countenance: he glanced with mingled tenderness and joy at Agnes; and then he exclaimed, "What munificence! what a proof of friendship!"

"What mean you, Charles?" asked Lord Ormsby, while the looks of the ladies were fixed with curiosity upon his countenance.

"I mean, my lord," responded our hero, "that in addition to the dower which you had so generously, although so unnecessarily, promised to bestow upon your daughter, she will proceed as a rich bride to the altar. But, Oh! richer far art thou, dearest Agnes," cried our enraptured hero, "in the possession of thy many graces and virtues, than with all the gold which the world might bestow upon thee!"

Our heroine pressed her lover's hand: a glance of tenderness flashed from her eye, while a modest blush suffused her cheeks.

"By these documents," continued the Count of Camerino, "the Countess di Milazzo assigns and makes over to you, dear Agnes, the magnificent palace of Spartivento at Turin,—that palace which she herself only the other day received from her sister Bianca. But this is not all! The Countess makes over to you likewise a sum of money equivalent to about thirty thousand pounds in English currency, and which is held by certain eminent Sardinian bankers at her ladyship's disposal."

"This is indeed munificent!" said Lord Ormsby.

"It is almost incredible!" ejaculated Mrs. De Vere, who was now as much dazzled and astounded by the gift as she had been disappointed a few minutes back when she thought it consisted only of a simple wreath of pearls.

As for Agnes, the tears were rolling down her cheeks,—tears of the deepest emotion as she thought of Lucia di Milazzo's proof of sisterly love; and she whispered to Charles, "The gift is far too splendid! I cannot accept it!"

Our hero reflected for nearly a minute; and then, drawing Agnes aside, he said, "Yes, dearest, I think you may accept it; for if I can rightly conjecture, the poor Countess is about to seek a retirement where there is no need to be the possessor of palaces, and where the world's wealth is of but little avail!"

Agnes gave no verbal answer; but she showed by her looks that she had already entertained the same idea in reference to the intention which the generous Countess di Milazzo now cherished.

While these personages were discussing all this stupendous munificence, Lucia herself was already journeying in her travelling-carriage along the road from Florence to Sienna. It was late in the evening when she reached that city; and it was not until the forenoon of the following day that she proceeded to pay the visit which had brought her thither. This was to her sister in the convent of La Trinità.

Nearly two months had elapsed since they separated; and when Lucia was shown into the convent parlour, she sat trembling on a chair, wondering how the prisonage was borne by the penitent, and whether it had made a painful change in her appearance. In a few minutes the door opened—and a tall form, wearing the conventual dress, with cheeks that were very pale, and with a slow and mournful step, entered the room. This was she who had so lately borne the proud title of Princess of Spartivento—she who was so lately the rich and brilliant Bianca—a principal star amidst the galaxy of the beauty and fashion of Turin—and a presiding genius in formidable conspiracies! But no longer was she the patrician Princess of Spartivento—no longer the brilliant Bianca! She was plain Sister Agonia.

Sister Agonia therefore must we call her. She did not rush forward into Lucia's arms: she did not bound towards her as one who beheld a countenance breaking like a cheerful light upon that monastic gloom: but she advanced slowly, with a solemn ghost-like step, and with a look which not by means of a smile, but with only the assumption of serene resignation instead of deep mournfulness, did she express a welcome. But it was otherwise with the Countess di Milazzo:—she stood still for a few moments, gazing upon her sister as if to fathom the precise state of her mind; and then she sprang forward and caught her in her arms.

"Bianca! dearest Bianca!" ejaculated the loving and affectionate Lucia.

"Hush! that name is not known here!"—and it was in a cold tone that the recluse spoke,—not as if she were deficient in feeling towards Lucia, but as if all the power of giving it vent were paralyzed by a frozen condition of the heart itself. "I am Sister Agonia."

"And do you regret—do you regret," asked Lucia, "that you have retired from the world?"

"Regret it?—no!" replied Sister Agonia: "how could I regret it? Of what use was I any longer in the world? how could I have remained there in honour and safety for myself? Besides, were there not crimes whereof it was needful to repent? and therefore I regret not my seclusion from the world. But I will confess one thing—"

"And what is that, dear sister?" asked Lucia, quickly.

"I do not know but that I am committing a sin," said Sister Agonia, hesitating, "to allow my thoughts to travel in such a channel even for a single instant—"

"Pray tell me, dear sister!" interjected the Countess.

The recluse suddenly bent upon Lucia a look that was much altered from that which she had just before thrown upon her:—it was a look which showed that the ice of the heart had begun to thaw—a look wherein was reflected something of that tenderness of former days which had existed with so much fervour between the two sisters.

"Lucia, dearest Lucia," she said in a voice that likewise seemed to indicate a reviving emotion, "there are times when if I have a single regret, it is—it is—"

The brow of the Countess clouded, and her look became serious.



"Oh, you wrong me, Lucia," exclaimed the recluse, instantaneously penetrating her sister's thoughts. "I regret not the world on account of him. On the contrary, I have already learnt to stifle all such unhallowed love in my heart. I am Sister Agnes."

She thus spoke her conventual name significantly as if it expressed her own condition of mind. She bent down her looks, and the resignation of self-martyrdom was upon her countenance. The tears had started into Lucia's eyes: she hastily wiped them away—and taking her sister's hand, she pressed it to her lips, at the same time saying, "Explain yourself—Oh, explain yourself, dearest, dearest sister? What subject for regret have you?"

"Do not ask me!" interjected Sister Agnes, with a strange abruptness: and then she became all cold and glacial again, so that Lucia once more felt that the sister was lost in the nun. "Tell

me," continued the recluse, "have you executed all my instructions?"

"Everything has been accomplished," answered Lucia. "Your immense wealth has been realised and disposed of amongst the various establishments and institutions whereof you gave me the list. And here," added Lucia, producing a document, "is the paper bequeathing the endowment which you named for the convent of La Trinita. —Ab, no!" ejaculated Lucia, with sudden vehemence, "I have given you the wrong paper! Here is the right one!"—and snatching back the first-mentioned document, she substituted another in the twinkling of an eye.

"What does this mean?" asked Sister Agnes. "It is nothing—nothing!"—and Lucia still looked confused. "There! you have got the right paper now—and you can place it in the hand of your Abbess at any moment. In respect to your other instructions——"

"You have kept the Spartivento Palace for yourself?"

"I took possession of the palace: but—but—" and Lucia faltered out her words—"I have bestowed it upon another."

"Bestowed it upon another?" exclaimed Sister Agonia, who was more and more convinced that there was something strange in her sister's conduct. "But you destroyed the waxen effigy of my husband?"

"Yes—and the effigy of my own deceased husband likewise," answered Lucia. "The suburbanens too are all bricked up—"

"But wherefore destroy the effigy of your own husband?" demanded Sister Agonia. "Do you not mean to live for Italy? have you no more patriotism nor ambition?"

"Ambition I never had, otherwise than to gain the approval of my conscience," rejoined Lucia. "As for patriotism, it is now confined to mere hopes and aspirations—and never again can display itself by deeds and positive actions!"

"And you have given away the Spartivento Palace?"

"Henceforth, dear sister," responded Lucia, "I shall not live in palaces. I have bestowed the one at Turin upon the charming and beautiful Agnes Evelyn, who in a few days will become Countess of Camerino."

Sister Agonia reflected for nearly a minute; and then she said, "If you did not really want the palace, Lucia, I am glad that you have thus bestowed it. You have still your own beautiful villa at Nice—"

"No—I have sold it," answered the Countess di Milazzo.

"At all events," proceeded Sister Agonia, "you have a handsome fortune, and you can rove or fix your abode where you will."

"Indeed," interrupted Lucia, "I have no longer a handsome fortune. I have realized all I possess. One third I have given to six hospitals and institutions which were omitted from your list—the next third I have bestowed upon Agnes Evelyn, in addition to the palace—"

"And the other third?" interjected Sister Agonia, with a renewed interest—we might even call it an excitement.

"The other third?" said Lucia. "Oh, it is represented by this document—the one which I just now accidentally placed in your hand instead of the one which really concerned you."

"Lucia! Lucia! what mean you?" exclaimed the recluse, now trembling visibly, while a flush, but slight and hectic, appeared upon her cheeks.

"You just now spoke of a regret, dear sister," answered the Countess. "I also have experienced a regret."

"And that regret, sister? Wherein does it consist?"

"In being separated from you."

It was a cry of joy which burst from the lips of Sister Agonia; and then the next moment she shrank back, trembling and becoming more deadly pale than before, as she was smitten with the cruel doubt whether she had rightly interpreted the meaning of Lucia's words and the intent of her actions.

"And what was your regret?" asked the Countess.

"The same words express it. It was being separated from you."

"We will not remain separated!" said Lucia. "No—we will not be separated!"

Again the cry of joy went forth from the lips of Sister Agonia; and now she precipitated herself into Lucia's arms.

"I am wearied of the world, as you were," said the Countess, when the feelings of her sister had found their natural vent; "and I have resolved to retire from it. This is wherefore I no longer need palaces nor revenues;—and this is why the effigy of my deceased husband would be powerless to inspire me with energy on behalf of that cause for which I am ready to lay down my life, but for which I can struggle no longer. And now, dear sister," added Lucia, once more producing the document which she had concealed about her person, "let me also present the Abbess of La Trinita with an endowment—for this deed conveys one on my own behalf!"

The sisters again embraced fervently, and they mingled their tears as well as their kisses. And all was done as Lucia had prearranged:—she abjured her rank as Countess of Milazzo—she renounced likewise that sweet Christian name of Lucia—and ere the sun closed upon that day, her identity was lost beneath the conventual garb and under the appellation of Sister Misericordia.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE FATAL MEETING.

THE scene now changes to Genoa. It was evening, and the dusk was closing in, as a gentleman, enveloped in a cloak, entered the court-yard of an hotel after having been strolling on the port and through the streets. He entered the coffee-room; and without immediately taking off his cloak and hat, he looked around him upon the guests who were already assembled there, and who were perhaps a dozen in number. There was something of a suspicious scrutiny in that look: but the individual was apparently satisfied with the result of his survey—for having completed it, he took off his hat, doffed his mantle, rang the bell and ordered dinner. The repast was served up with that promptitude which is displayed in the Continental hotels—especially in that well-ordered one to which we are now alluding at Genoa. The gentleman sat down: he however ate little—but on the other hand, as if to indemnify himself for his want of appetite, he applied himself with tolerable freedom to the bottle. Indeed it appeared as if he were either addicted to wine-bibbing, young though he were—or as if he had some secret care which he was endeavouring to drown amidst the fumes of liquor. That this latter hypothesis was the more correct one, might be surmised from the fact that he ever and anon cast looks of anxious inquiry upon the other guests assembled there, and every time the door opened he started as if he dreaded lest some calamity were about to be announced.

Presently all the other gentlemen who were dining in the coffee-room, began to disperse, until at length the particular individual of whom we are speaking was the only one who remained there.

So soon as he was alone, he could no longer subdue the agitation and nervousness which had got possession of him. He paced to and fro—he stopped short—he clenched his fists—then he sat down, and drew forth from his pockets a pair of very small, but elegantly manufactured pistols, which he examined with a half fierce, half desperate air. Consigning them to his pockets again, he rang the bell and ordered in a further supply of wine.

Very soon afterwards the door opened, and a gentleman with sandy hair, whiskers, and moustache, entered the coffee-room. The gentleman who was already there, started and then appeared to be seized with an utter uncertainty in respect to the course which he ought to adopt.

"Why! surely," ejaculated the new-comer in accents of surprise, "you are Hardress?"—and he held out his hand.

Hector—for he indeed was the individual with the tortured mind, the nervous trembling, and the pocket-pistols—grasped the hand with a fervour as if it were something new to him, and therefore most delightful, to encounter a friend.

"My dear Mervyn," he said, "I am rejoiced to see you. Where have you been this long time past?"

"Chiefly in Paris," replied Viscount Mervyn. "I am sorry, Hector, to have read and heard of so many terrible things in connexion with yourself—very sorry, positively."

"Terrible indeed!" interjected Hardress.

"Very bad—positively," said Mervyn. "I am told—excuse my remark—'tis as well to be candid—I was told, I say, that you were cut by all the English at Brussels and Paris. Deuced awkward! But I am not over fastidious. Besides, I think you must have quite enough upon your mind—quite enough, positively—without being made more miserable."

"You are a good fellow, Mervyn!" exclaimed Hardress. "Yes! the devil has mixed himself up in all my affairs of late! My poor sister first—and then my mother—and I abroad, unable to attend my mother's funeral——"

"Awkward and sad—sad and awkward!" cried Mervyn. "But where is your wife, Hardress?"

"I left her ill at Brussels. She received a deuce of a shock—an uncle of her's dying without leaving her anything——"

"Bad, bad," said Mervyn. "I think I can guess who the uncle was. But no matter! 'Tis all very sad—positively. Well, so you left Mrs. Hardress ill at Brussels?—and then you went to Paris, where the English residents behaved very uncivil to you."

"But it wasn't on account of their incivility I left Paris," interrupted Hector. "I was only two days at Maurice's Hotel——"

"Why did you leave?" asked Mervyn.

"For the same reason that I suddenly left Brussels," replied Hardress. "You are evidently my friend, Mervyn—and I will tell you the exact state of affairs. The truth is—and the unhappy young man looked ghastly as he made the statement—"it was whispered to me, first in Brussels, that the Belgian Government meant to give me up to an English detective who was after me: then the same rumour reached me in Paris with respect to the intentions of the French Government; so that to be brief, Mervyn, I feel as if I

had been hunted from pillar to post—and here I am, lurking about—playing at hide and seek as it were at Genoa!"

"Very awkward," ejaculated the Viscount! "very unpleasant—positively—actually! I pity you, my dear Hardress! And you mean to tell me that an English detective is truly, literally, and undoubtedly in pursuit of you?"

"I mean to say that such is my apprehension, on account of all that I have heard: but whether it be actually true or not, I cannot take it upon myself to say. I don't even know the law upon the subject—I have been afraid to ask—I have taken it for granted that what rumour whispered in my ear must be correct. My fears have seemed to confirm the reports themselves. I am wretched, Mervyn!"

"You look so—positively, my dear fellow. When did you arrive here?"

"Only last evening. And you?"

"Only this afternoon. You have dined," continued Mervyn: "at least, if one may judge by the way you are drinking that wine. I shall not dine until presently. I have got a friend coming. Ah! by the bye, how strange!—it is Fitzherbert. You remember, he was your second in that duel which you fought some time ago with—that was his name then?—I mean that fine young Englishman who has become Count of Camerino."

"Charles De Vere," replied Hardress. "And so Fitzherbert is at Genoa?"

"By the bye," ejaculated Viscount Mervyn, "talking of that duel and Charles De Vere, put me in mind of those beautiful girls—the two cousins—We used to call them, if you remember, Beauty and Pleasure——"

"Ah!" and Hector gave a quick start; and seizing the wine-bottle, he filled his glass with a kindred impetuosity.

"Why what the deuce does this mean?" asked Mervyn. "You are unaccountable—positively—decidedly. Just because I mentioned those two sweet creatures you seem as if you were about to fly into the most violent rage! You are very droll with your troubles, Hector—very. As for one of the girls—Agnes—she whom we used to call Beauty—I have frequently heard her spoken of in the highest terms. She is going to marry the Count of Camerino. Floribel—that was Pleasure, you know—she went wrong—she went away with Clifford—But, Ah! I really forgot! it's a sore subject—positively—decidedly."

"Yes!" ejaculated Hector, fiercely, as he struck his clenched fist upon the table; "everything which in any way relates to Floribel Lieter is a sore subject with me! If you knew how I loved her—still love her—no, not love her!—hate her!"

"On my soul, Hardress," interjected the Viscount, "you are strange—incomprehensible—positively. With a handsome wife—as fine a woman as any in all Europe, positively—though perhaps there are some handsomer in the face—yet as for form and figure—pardon me for speaking in such terms of Mrs. Hardress——"

"Speak of her as you like," exclaimed Hector, with an almost fierce abruptness. "But if you wish to speak of a being who is adorable—one for whose sake a man could commit a thousand follies—a being in whose nature the most delicious voluptuousness mingles with the most elegant

refinement—one who is capable of becoming as profligate as Messalina herself, and who nevertheless would succeed in holding even the most fastidious of lovers in her silken chains,—if you want to speak to me of such a being as this, talk to me of Floribel!"

"And yet you said just now that you hated her?" observed the Viscount. "This is very strange—decidedly strange! It is even contradictory—positively."

"I know not how I feel towards her," exclaimed Hardress, bewildered and half maddened by the distracting influences of his own thoughts as well as by the wine of which he continued to drink glass after glass in rapid succession. "I could love her with an almost frenzied devotedness if she would throw herself into my arms: but while she scorns and loathes me—makes me the object of her caprices—flatters me at one moment, and then disappoints all my hopes the next——"

"But does she do all this?" asked the Viscount.

"Not actually at present, because I know not where she is," rejoined Hardress. "But this is what she *has* done—and it is for this that I hate her! Oh, that scene at Turin!"

"What scene?" inquired Mervyn. "You interest and amuse me, Hector—positively. But you alarm me—decidedly."

"What scene? Ah, I will tell you!" ejaculated the young man, who had just poured more wine down his throat.

But at this moment the door opened, and a gentleman hastened into the coffee-room. Hector instantaneously averted his countenance, for he was under the continuous apprehension of being observed and recognised by an English detective officer. The gentleman did not therefore catch a view of his features; but hurriedly accosting the Viscount, he said, "Who the deuce, my dear Mervyn, do you think has just arrived at the hotel?"

"Can't say—positively."

"With a sweet pretty lady's-maid, and such a fine handsome young man—whether her husband or lover I know not——"

"Who has thus arrived?" asked Mervyn.

"You remember Floribel Lister——"

"Floribel!"—and Hector sprang up from his chair.

"Ah, Mr. Hardress!" said the gentleman, who first made a movement of surprise and then instantaneously became cold in his demeanour and drew himself up haughtily.

"Tell me, Fitzherbert," cried Hector, who in the excitement of his mind did not immediately perceive the glacial air which the new-comer had just put on,—“tell me, you say that you saw Floribel?"

"If it be of any consequence, Mr. Hardress, for you to ascertain the fact," replied Captain Fitzherbert, in a freezing tone, "I have no objection to inform you that the lady in question has just alighted from a carriage in the court-yard of the hotel."

"How strange!" cried Hector. "Are we destined to meet here? But you said, I think—yes, did you not say"—and his countenance became white with rage—"that she had a person with her—a lover perhaps?"

"You had better make inquiries for yourself,"

interrupted Captain Fitzherbert curtly, as he turned his back with an air of loathing and disgust upon Hardress.

At any other time, or under different circumstances, Hector would have avenged such an affront upon the spot by means of a blow, or would at least have challenged the author of the insult. But he was not now the master of his own thoughts nor actions; and in the whirl of ideas which were agitating confusedly in his brain, he failed to perceive how different the manner of the punctilious and high-noted Fitzherbert was from that of the good-natured and stolid Mervyn.

Hardress stood transfixed for a few moments after Fitzherbert had turned his back upon him; then suddenly ejaculating, "Floribel is here!" he made a rush towards the door and burst from the coffee-room.

Let us now shift the scene for a few minutes to another part of the hotel. Floribel, accompanied by the handsome Sardinian officer, Captain St. Didier—and attended by the pretty and faithful Antonia—was following the landlady up to a suite of apartments. Floribel and her lover had come to pass two or three weeks at Genoa, St. Didier having obtained leave of absence for the purpose. They had just returned from Florence, to which St. Didier had been sent by the King of Sardinia on a private mission to the Grand Duke, concerning the recent Italian conspiracies into which the young Sardinian officer had obtained so much insight through the medium of the spy Fossano. We need hardly observe that Floribel had accompanied St. Didier to the Tuscan capital: it was through him that she had seen the plan of the subterranean of the Camerico mansion—and it was this circumstance that had enabled her to accomplish her design in obtaining an interview alone with Agnes,—a last interview, at which there might be no fear of intrusion nor interruption.

But to return to the thread of our story—we were saying that Floribel had now arrived at the hotel at Genoa with her lover and her lady's-maid. They were conducted to a suite of apartments; and while dinner was in preparation, they proceeded to make some change in their toilets after a long day's travelling. St. Didier retired to a dressing-room, while Floribel was attended by Antonia in the bed-chamber.

"Excuse me, dear signora," said Antonia, whom circumstances as well as her tried and proved fidelity placed upon a somewhat familiar footing with her mistress, "but methinks you have been low-spirited to-day?"

"Indeed!" ejaculated Floribel.

"Yes, signora—and I could not help noticing it this morning, when assisting in the performance of your toilet. Ah! there you sigh, signora!"

"Nonsense, Antonia!" interjected Floribel, somewhat petulantly.

"Pardon me, signora, if I offended you," said the young abigail, a cloud coming over her pretty features: "you know that I would not for the world——"

"My dear Antonia," cried Floribel, "do not be vexed or grieved—I did not mean to speak harshly to you. You have served me too faithfully to be treated unkindly. Yes, my dear girl, you are right. I am out of spirits! But I dare say I shall rally presently. Yet that dream!"

"Oh, dear signora," cried Antonia, her countenance suddenly brightening up, "if it were only a dream which has left its influence upon your mind—and no real trouble——"

"It was only a dream, Antonia. But then there was the coincidence! Ah, I see that you do not understand me—as indeed how can you? for I must seem to be talking in enigmas! What I mean is that it is not the first time I have had this dream:—it is the second."

"Well, dear signora," answered Antonia, "I suppose a person may dream the same thing over two or three times—especially if on the first occasion it leaves any particular impression on the mind."

"Yet there are dreams, Antonia, so different from others," pursued Floribel, in a low melancholy voice,—"dreams which appear to foreshadow one's very destiny! Let me tell you something—for you are in my confidence, and you know that when I paid that stealthy visit to the Camerino mansion, it was to see my cousin Agnes. And I have told you likewise that this cousin of mine has led the purest and chastest and holiest life, and she is now about to be rewarded by espousing him who possesses her heart. Well, sometime ago, Antonia, I dreamt that she received a gift of a simple chaplet of flowers;—and that chaplet was emblematical of the virgin purity of her thoughts and of her life down to the present time. She by her conduct has fulfilled that prophetic portion of my dream!"

"It is only by straining the point very much, dear signora," remarked Antonia, "that you can complete your illustration or make your deductions."

"Oh, but I tremble with a superstitious fear," responded Floribel, shuddering visibly, "lest the remaining portion of my dream should receive its allegorical fulfilment! That portion of which I first spoke, referred to my cousin Agnes: the other portion relates to myself. And it is this latter portion which I dreamt again last night, Antonia, and which has left a saddening effect upon my mind! All day long I have endeavoured to rally my spirits—but vainly. St. Didier saw that I was melancholy and desponding: at first he persisted in questioning me—I pleaded a headache, and he believed me."

"And that dream, signora—was it then so very, very terrible?" asked Antonia.

Floribel again shuddered visibly; and she said in a low voice, which had something hollow in its tone, "Terrible indeed, Antonia! Methought that I was suddenly brought to gaze upon that dread object which affords the hideous proof that all earthly enjoyment and luxury, all display and pride, as well as pleasure, must terminate in a ghastly skeleton at last!"

Antonia started, and something like a faint cry escaped her lips.

"Yes—such was my dream," resumed Floribel. "I need not enter into further details. Suffice it to say, Antonia, that it was reproduced last night just as I dreamt it at the very time when I was first hovering upon the brink of the precipice down which I soon after fell! Can it be an omen of evil, Antonia, this reappearance of that vision? I have borne the name of Pleasure—and am I destined like pleasure itself to be short-lived?"

"Dearest signora," cried the young abigail, with a frightened air, "do not abandon yourself to these gloomy ideas—and all for a dream! You are come to Genoa to enjoy yourself—you are with one who loves you devotedly, and who is proud of you—you will create a sensation here! And look at yourself in the mirror, dearest signora!—how handsome you are! When you join Captain St. Didier in the dining-room, you will see with what joy and pleasure his eyes will light up as he surveys you."

"Well," said Floribel, "I must make an effort to regain my spirits: I have no right to sadden him. Besides, I daresay all this is very foolish on my part—and the impression will presently pass away and to-morrow I shall laugh or else be angry with myself for having entertained these fears. Yes—you have taken more than usual pains with my toilet, dear Antonia," added Floribel, as she looked in the mirror which reflected her face and form of ravishing beauty.

Antonia smiled with delight to observe that her mistress was evidently becoming more cheerful.

"And now I will proceed to the dining-room," said Floribel. "But, Ah! what disturbance is that?" she ejaculated, as she opened the door of the chamber. "Voices in altercation! What can it mean?" and she sped along a little passage belonging to the suite of apartments and leading to the dining-room.

But let us pause to ascertain what was the origin of the disturbance the sounds of which had thus suddenly reached Floribel's ears.

Hector Hardress, maddened with his ideas and with wine, had rushed forth from the coffee-room and had sped into the court-yard, where he put a few hasty questions to a hostler in respect to the arrival which Captain Fitzherbert had already mentioned. He learnt enough to convince him that Floribel was indeed at that moment an inmate of the hotel: but he could not discover who her male companion was. He paced to and fro for upwards of a quarter of an hour, vainly endeavouring to cool his fevered brain—until goaded to madness by the influence of his evil passions, and by the copious draughts of liquor which he had swallowed, he resolved to seek an interview, at all risks and at all hazards, with Floribel. He had no settled aim in view: he was far from being sufficiently self-possessed to deliberate upon the proceeding: his only thought—the all-absorbing one—was that inasmuch as Floribel was *here*, he must see her.

By means of an inquiry put to a waiter, he learnt to which suite of apartments the recently arrived travellers had been shown; and he rushed up the staircase. He opened the outer door of the suite—he strode across the little vestibule—he entered the dining-room. At that very instant St. Didier entered the room likewise, from a door at the opposite extremity.

"Your business, signor?" demanded the Sardinian officer somewhat curtly, for there was enough in Hector's manner to make him look suspiciously or at least strangely upon the intruder.

"My business is not with you, signor," exclaimed the excited Englishman.

"But your name?" asked St. Didier.

"My name? You shall not know it. It concerns you not!"

"Ah, signor!" cried St. Didier, colouring with indignation, "we shall soon see whether persons may be permitted thus to intrude!—But perhaps it may be a mistake?" he suddenly ejaculated.

"Yes—yes!" cried Hector, with feverish excitement; "it is a mistake! I ought not to have spoken rudely! I wished to pay my respects to a lady—Floribel—Flora Lovel—or—or—I know not her name now——"

"If you be a friend or acquaintance, signor," answered St. Didier, "at least tell me your name."

"Well, then, it is Hardress. And now——"

"Signor," interrupted St. Didier sternly—for he instantaneously recollected how he himself had been instrumental in procuring Hector's arrest at Turin at Floribel's instigation; "the lady to whom you allude cannot wish to see you, and will not receive you. I command you to quit this apartment."

"By heaven, I will see Floribel, if only for an instant!" exclaimed Hardress. "She shall decide betwixt you and me! You are a rival—and perdition take me if I bring not matters to a crisis!"

"Madman!" cried St. Didier, "retire!"

"Attempt not to bar my way!" vociferated Hardress. "Stand aside! By heaven I will pass on! Stand aside, I command you!"

"Keep back, madman!" ejaculated St. Didier. "Depart!—or if you provoke me——"

"Stand aside! Ah, you will not!" thundered Hector. "Then take that!"

He drew forth a pistol; and it was with a sudden cry of terror that St. Didier sprang aside as the infuriate young man levelled it at him. At that very same instant, as the pistol exploded, the door at the extremity leading from the passage, opened—and with a piercing shriek Floribel dropped upon the threshold.

"Wretch!" vociferated St. Didier; "you have killed her!"—and springing forward, he raised her in his arms. "Dead! dead!" were the ejaculations that burst forth, accompanied by the mournfullest cry, from the Sardinian's lips.

Hector Hardress stood transfixed, with ghastliest horror, for some moments, gazing upon the tragedy: but suddenly starting as if galvanised, he drew forth his second pistol—placed the muzzle in his mouth—and as the report again echoed through the apartment, he fell a corpse upon the floor.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

A HAPPY day was that on which the young Count of Camerino conducted the beautiful Agnes to the altar in the chapel of the British Embassy at Florence. Never had our young hero looked more eminently handsome!—never had our heroine appeared more exquisitely lovely! The charming Laura and Mirtilla Germini acted as bridesmaids. Edger Marcellin, with his pretty and beloved wife Corinna—Sir Alexander and Lady Holcroft—as well as the British and the French Ambassadors, the Marquis of Ortona, Signor Palmas, and a few other faithful friends, were amongst the bridal

party. Lord Ormsby and Mrs. De Vere experienced emotions of mingled pride and joy, which were of that half rapturous, half affecting character that cannot be described.

When the ceremony was concluded, and the bridal party had returned to the hotel, a procession of the most lovely Florentine damsels belonging to the middle class, appeared to present bouquets of flowers to the bride and bridegroom: for the romance which belonged to the many thrilling adventures through which our hero had passed, had excited the liveliest interest not merely on his own account, but likewise on that of the beautiful being who had just plighted to him her vows at the altar. And thus it was an ovation of the most interesting and touching character which followed the nuptials of Charles and Agnes.

And when, in a few days afterwards, the happy pair returned to their splendid domain, with what enthusiastic joy was the bridal party greeted by the peasantry as well as by all the inhabitants of the town of Camerino and the neighbourhood! Triumphal arches were erected—bands of music were playing—flowers were strewn upon the road—the municipal corporation presented congratulatory addresses—and if it were an ovation at Florence which had greeted the youthful pair, it was now a perfect triumph, thrilling and affecting, which welcomed the Count and Countess of Camerino to their home.

It was not until some weeks afterwards that the intelligence of Floribel's tragic fate reached the Camerino mansion: and then it was brought by the faithful and afflicted Antonia, who was almost heartbroken at the loss of her beloved mistress. Agnes wept for her cousin's death; but the incident was only a transient cloud passing over the heaven of that happiness which our heroine was now destined to enjoy. As for Antonia, another situation was procured for her through the good offices of the Count and Countess: she soon afterwards attracted the notice of a young tradesman of steady habits and good property—they were married—and Antonia has made a much better wife than might be expected of one who had served such mistresses as Lucrezia di Mirano and Floribel Lister.

It is precisely this same remark which we have now to make in respect to Lisetta,—who having after a while succeeded in persuading the somewhat giddy and soft-brained Andrew Hailes to make her "an honest woman," proved by her conduct that if she had been indiscreet at one period of her existence, she had principle and firmness sufficient to enable her to fulfil with an unexceptionable propriety all the duties of a wife.

In due course the Countess of Camerino received a communication from her who had recently borne in the world the sounding title of Countess of Milazzo, but who had almost completely hidden her identity under the humble appellation of Sister Misericordia. And the Countess of Camerino never visits the city of Siena without calling to see her friend the recluse; but it was not until the death of Sister Agonia, which occurred about a twelvemonth back, that the secret transpired of how she who was once the brilliant Princess of Spartivento, had also been secluded in the same convent.

Lord Mendlesham was some time before he recovered that succession of blows which struck him with such unrelenting rapidity: first the suicide of his daughter—then the death of his wife—then the self-destruction of his son Hector. But after awhile he grew calm and resigned, and a certain idea gradually expanded itself in his mind. He sought Lord Ormeby and consulted him upon it. That nobleman approved of the idea, which was then hinted to Mrs. De Vere. Finally the English newspapers one day copied a paragraph from the Continental journals, to the effect that Lord Mendlesham had on such-and-such a date been married, at the British Embassy in Florence, to Mrs. De Vere, mother of the Count of Camerino. But our hero has never suspected his mother's secret—never has learnt that in greeting a father-in-law it was veritably his own father whom he was thus welcoming! He was led to believe that Lord Mendlesham had loved his mother when both were young—that circumstances had then occurred to separate them—that they had contracted other alliances—but that now at last, after the lapse of

years, the affection of their earlier period had revived, to receive its sanction at the altar.

The Hon. Mrs. Hardress was, as we have seen, disappointed in a pecuniary sense at the death of her uncle Mr. Timperley. She soon after received another disappointment, on the score of her ambition; for when her husband Hector put a period to his existence, at the same time perished Cicely's hope of some day becoming Lady Mendlesham. She is still a widow; and she lives comfortably—even if not handsomely—on the interest of the dower which she extorted from her uncle. She resides chiefly in Brussels; and although whispers may be occasionally heard to the effect that she has her little private gallantries, yet she is either astute or discreet enough to maintain her character before the world.

It only remains for us to state that the completest happiness is enjoyed by Sir Roderick and Lady Dalham; and that whenever they think fit to take a tour to Italy, the most cordial welcome awaits them at the mansion of the Count and Countess of Camerino.

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